I Slithered Here from Eden

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I Slithered Here from Eden

by DarlingAsinis

Summary

Hannibal and Will are in the midst of planning their wedding when Hannibal is beckoned to Russia, Mishca resurfacing after decades apart. Will is left alone in their large home, accompanied by their pack of strays and developing sickness.

Jack calls Will in to work on the Minnesota Shrike case, assigning Dr. Emilie Schwartz as his temporary keeper. His brain slowly catches fire, continuing to burn up and fill his head with smoke, leaving him vulnerable to Dr. Schwartz and her manipulations.

Will Hannibal get home before it's too late?

OR: Season 1 rewrite with established Hannigram and a different doctor playing with Will. Hannibal is in Russia, unaware of what is happening to Will.

** Tags will be updated accordingly **

** ON HOLD **

** No Beta **

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1

It was 3:17 AM when Hannibal got the call. His cell phone buzzed to life on the nightstand waking him from a peaceful, dreamless slumber. He groaned, rubbing his eyes sleepily as he adjusted to the light of the screen. Without looking at the caller ID, Hannibal answered.

“Hello?” Hannibal asked, voice gravely with sleep.

Beside him, Will stirred.

“Someone better be dead…” Will groaned, grumpy to be woken so early. “Is it Jack?” Will questioned, “Was there another body?”

Hannibal did not answer. He quickly sat up, pulling the sheets from around his body and planting his feet on the ground. He soon stood and began pacing the room, quietly asking questions in Lithuanian to the stranger on the phone.

Will, confused, sat up and rubbed at his eyes, pulling the sheets around his shoulders, staring at his fiancé with furrowed brows.

After a few short words, Hannibal pulled the phone from his ear and stared at the screen with wet eyes.

“Love, what is it?”

“It’s Mischa. She’s been found.” Hannibal took in a shaky breath, “she’s alive.”

Tears streaked down Hannibal’s cheeks as Will pulled him into his arms, quietly shushing him and rubbing soft circles on his strong back. They sat on the bed, wrapped in blankets for hours, not moving until the sun began to rise on a new day. Hannibal quietly sobbed in his lover's arms.

“I have to go to her, Will. She – she’s not well.” Before Will could ask, Hannibal continued, “She’s in Russia. My uncle Robertus has chartered a plane for me. I should be landing and with her by sunset.”

Their world spun as this new reality was set upon them, a hope and desire that had long since died being revived in the short duration of the phone call. Hannibal had never given up on finding his sister after they were separated at the orphanage all those years ago, but after several dead ends, it seemed impossible to locate her.

Will sat, not daring to leave Hannibal’s side and not asking questions, knowing he did not yet have answers. He was aware that Hannibal would be making this trip without him; they both knew that Jack would refuse to loosen Will’s leash for an indefinite amount of time, not when there was a new serial killer that rivalled the Chesapeake Ripper in town. So instead, they sat in a quiet but loving silence, nothing but the soft cracking of a dying fire in their hearth and the quiet snores of their pack on the floor.

After Hannibal worked up the courage to start his day and make his way to the washroom, Will took it upon himself to draft an email to be sent to Hannibal's patients declaring his leave of absence, making sure not to send it until it received a careful review from the psychiatrist.

Soon, the sound of the shower turning on came, and Will rose to let the dogs out in the yard and started prepping their meals. He prepared coffee in Hannibal's insane contraption that Will had somehow learned to use and made his future husband's cup just the way he liked it, taking his time, not wanting to accept that his future husband would be on the opposite side of the globe for an indefinite amount of time. He finished making the cup faster than intended and took it upstairs, entering the bedroom just as Hannibal left the washroom.

Upon entering the bedroom, Will was met with his beautiful finacés figure in nothing but a loose towel around his hips and a heavy look of worry in his eyes. A blush crept up his cheek and ears as he turned to put the cup of coffee aside, quickly turning back to wrap his arms around the older man's chest.

"She's going to be okay," Will whispered into his lover's throat, nose nuzzled behind his ear. He peppered soft kisses down his neck and shoulder.

A soft sigh and a short nod were all he was given in return. After a few moments of silence, Hannibal gently pulled Will's hands from him and moved into the closet to dress. Once buttoned into his three-piece suit, he returned to his partner's side and thanked him for the coffee.

The two shared a soft kiss while Will brushed Hannibal's damp hair out of his eyes. They gazed at one another lovingly, only ending when Will's phone rang.

"I think someone actually died this time," Will joked, winning a soft chuckle from his partner. "I drafted an email for you, by the way, to send out to patients."

Hannibal nodded with a soft "Thank you, Will."

Will sighed and answered his phone, "Mornin', Jack."

Meanwhile, Hannibal glanced over the email Will had written and was pleased enough to send it out to his patients. He could overhear the agitated conversation between Will and Jack; Will trying to explain that he could not come in today, vaguely mentioning a 'family emergency.' Jack was clearly not pleased and continued to guilt trip Will with his usual spiel about saving lives.

The call quickly ended, and Will looked exhausted, digging the palms of his hands into his eyes.

"Eight girls are missing in Minnesota. No bodies have been found, but they share the same profile – same hair colour, eyes, age, complexion… he wants me at Quantico within the hour." He looked up at Hannibal with sad blue eyes.

Hannibal sat beside him and pulled Will into his arms. He knew how much Will hated fieldwork, and Jack had been sparingly forcing it on him in recent years thanks to his intervening, persuading Jack to understand the toll it took on the professor. He had witnessed many sleepless and nightmare-filled nights, often losing sleep himself to comfort Will, reminding him that he was safe. While the nightmares have not dissipated, they have certainly reduced in occurrence and continue to do so the longer he stays at his lectern. The two men held one another, not wanting to let go, knowing they would both be pursuing hurt and heartache in the coming days.

Will soon rose, quickly going to the washroom to wash his face with cold water. He returned and helped his love pack his luggage, pulling out some of Hannibal's favourite suits, carefully folding them and placing them in his bag.

He put in Hannibal's bag a worn copy of Dante's Inferno. The two had spent countless hours reading it, often quoting it to one another in passing – the poem was important to them, and he wanted Hannibal to have part of their love with him while away.

The last thing he packed, without Hannibal's knowledge, was a worn flannel shirt of his own, one he knew Hannibal hated, but it smelt like him. He wasn't sure how much comfort it would provide for his future husband, but he knew he would be doing the same with one of Hannibal's shirts when he inevitably flew out to Minnesota. Before packing it in its ziplock bag, he sprayed some of his cologne on it. He then sealed it up and buried it at the bottom of his luggage.

They shared one last breakfast together before having to leave. Hannibal said goodbye to each of the dogs, making sure to give them all lots of pets before they had to leave. Several chaste kisses were shared at the front door, wrapped up in one another's arms, not knowing when they would see each other again. Hannibal cupped Will's face, foreheads together while they whispered their final goodbyes.

After promising to stay in contact and set times to video call one another, they gave each other one last 'I love you' a final kiss, and broke apart. Each got in their car and left their home.

One morning, Dr. Emilie Schwartz received a phone call from the head of the BAU, Jack Crawford. Quickly, she straightened her back, crossed her legs at the knee and glanced at her reflection, ensuring every hair was in place. Elegantly, she answered the phone, holding it to her ear with perfectly manicured nails.

"Dr. Schwartz, how may I help you?" She asked politely.

"Good evening, Dr. Schwartz. This is Agent Jack Crawford from the BAU. Do you have a moment to speak?"

“Yes, of course, Agent Crawford. What can I do for you?”

Jack let out a short huff.

“I have a criminal profiler who requires ongoing psychiatric care, and I've heard you're one of the best there is, save Heimlich at Harvard and Bloom at Georgetown.”

Emile pursed her lips at such a distasteful comparison but did not dare interject.

“Are you available to meet him later today, say, around noon? I apologize for the short notice, but his current psychiatrist has an emergency to attend to.”

Dr. Schwartz could sense a level of urgency in the man's voice, layered with agitation. Clearly, he felt as if he was inconvenienced.

“I absolutely can be, Agent Crawford. Tell me, who is this profiler?” She asked, maintaining a professional but curious front.

“Will Graham.” He sighed. “He’s been in and out of fieldwork for the last few years, mostly out, only working on major cases. He’s one of our best, and I need him at his best… especially at times like these.”

“Ah, I completely understand. I look forward to seeing you both later today. I’m sure we will be a perfect fit.”

“Wonderful. Thank you, Dr. Schwartz. See you later.”

“See you later, Agent Crawford. Take care.”

She hung up the phone and laid her hand on her desk, tapping her long nails. She pulled a handheld mirror from her desk drawer, and carefully reapplied her lipstick, fixing her mask in place. A smug smile crept across her lips as she resurfaced her plans for flaying open Will Graham’s psyche from the back of her mind.

Time to wind him up and watch him go.

Where to begin?

To be continued…

Chapter 2

Will let his students out early to make it to Jack's office for their meeting at noon. He quickly packed up his laptop and students' papers and walked across campus as fast as possible, desperately hoping to make it on time.

Once he reached the glass door of Jack's office, he walked in after a quick knock, not waiting for a response and immediately stopped in his tracks when he lifted his eyes.

Across from Jack was a middle-aged woman sitting in one of the guest chairs. She had long black hair with a thick streak of grey that grew from the front of her hairline and settled around her face in precise curls. She sat with a straight back, her legs crossed at the knee and hands folded neatly in her lap. The woman was dressed in all black with a fitted suit, a turtleneck, and sharp heels to match. Whoever she was, she was the definition of poise.

Both sets of eyes turned to look at Will, the woman with a raised eyebrow and somewhat pursed lips that turned to a small smile when she saw him. He was confused about who she was and why she was in Jack's office.

"Sorry if I'm interrupting something." He said, eyes burning into the floor. He started to turn to the door when Jack spoke.

"You're not, Will. Please, sit." Jack motioned towards the empty seat.

He sat in the chair next to the woman. She smiled politely at him, and he did not smile back nor meet her eyes.

"You're not a fan of eye contact, are you?"

Will huffed out an irritated sigh, squeezing the arms of the chair.

"Eyes are distracting; you see too much, you don't see enough. And- And it's hard to focus when you're thinking, 'Oh, those whites are really white,' or, 'He must have hepatitis,' or, 'Oh, is that a burst vein?' So, yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible. Jack?"

Jack glanced up, giving an apologetic smile to the woman.

"Yes, Will?"

"Who is this?"

"This is Dr. Emilie Schwartz. She's going to be your temporary psychiatrist until Hannibal can come back home." Jack braced for the oncoming battle he knew was coming his way.

Will snorted, irritated and closed the file.

"I don't need a keeper Jack." He glanced over at Dr. Schwartz and pushed his glasses up his nose. "No offence to you, Dr. Schwartz, but I'm gonna pass."

Emilie smiled at Will politely, readying herself to speak before Jack interjected.

“Will, you don’t have a choice.” He leaned forward on his desk, handing Will a case file. He opened it and glanced over the details while Jack continued speaking. “We need you, and in order to have you, you need a psychiatrist. This is not up for discussion.”

“Jack, c’mon.” Will let out a stifled laugh, leaning back, closing the file and looking at the man’s nameplate. “I’m sure I can manage one case without an aide. Just keep me off the field till Hannibal’s home if you’re so worried about me going crazy.”

Jack took a deep breath, opening his eyes to glare daggers into Will.

“This is not up for debate, Will. We have no idea how long he’ll be out or how many cases you’ll be on until then. Dr. Schwartz will be working beside you until Dr. Lecter is home. Speaking of Lecter, what happened?”

Will glared back at Jack. “That is for him to tell you.” He worked his jaw. “Don’t expect him home for at least a month.”

“For what it’s worth, Will, I look forward to working with you.” Emilie used a soothing voice. It irritated Will.

“Yeah,” Will grumbled and stood, pacing the office, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth.

He stopped at the corkboard with the Minnesota case information. Closing his eyes Will let the pendulum swing once, twice, and thrice. When they reopened, he turned to face Jack.

“It’s not about all of these girls, just about one of them. He’s like Willy Wonka. Every girl he takes is a candy bar, and hidden in amongst all those candy bars is the one true intended victim, which, if we follow through on our metaphor, is your golden ticket.”

Will stormed out of Jack’s office after the meeting, unhappy to be forced back into the field and furious that Jack is forcing a stranger to poke around in his head.

He quickly returned to his lecture hall, fingers pulling stray dog hairs from his sleeves and messenger bag over his shoulder. Once back in his room, he sat down, head in hand and took in several deep breaths, trying to calm himself as Hannibal had taught him.

Will took a few minutes to look up Dr. Schwartz; if he was being forced to have a new psychiatrist, he wanted to know everything he could about her. There was not much about her online, and he couldn’t find any social media accounts. He discovered that she had graduated from Columbia University in New York and had managed to find a couple of articles in the Northern Medical Journal of Psychiatry published under her name. There was a website for

her private practice located in downtown Washington. Other than that, there wasn't much to find.

He anxiously read through every bit of information he could; he closed all the tabs and pulled out his phone to text Hannibal. Upon opening their chat, he saw a message from Hannibal, received several hours earlier, letting him know he had boarded his plane.

<< Glad to hear you're officially up in the air. Jack got me a new psychiatrist while you're gone. How's your day going so far? >>

>> Quite uneventful since this morning. I know you dislike other psychiatrists, but it may be for the best. I would hate for you to be alone at a crime scene. What are they like? <<

<< I know… I just don't want a stranger in there. She seems fine, I guess. Not really interested in getting to know her, though. >>

>> Please give her a chance. <<

>> It pains me not to be there with you; I hope you know that. <<

<< Of course. I know you have to go to her. I just wish I was there with you… I don't want you out there alone, either. >>

>> I wish you were here too. <<

<< Maybe I can try and wiggle myself free from Jack's grasp and fly out. It would be nice to finally meet your family, despite the circumstances. >>

>> Well, please keep me updated. You know you are always welcome, but please refrain from any surprises. I'm unsure of my sister's state and would like to keep things quiet for her. <<

<< Of course, Hon. I gotta go… my students are coming in. Please remember to call when you land! >>

>> Of course, dear. Have a good lesson. I promise to call you as soon as I can. <<

<< Thank you! I love you. Be safe. >>

>> And I, you. Take care. <<

Will put his phone on his desk as his students filed in. He quickly set up his projector and waited 10 minutes after the hour to start his lesson. He moved around his desk and leaned on it, clicking on the next slide.

"Everyone has thought about killing someone, one way or another."

Will was sitting on the back porch with the dogs and nursing a glass of whiskey when Hannibal called.

“Hey, I take it you’ve landed?”

“Hello, darling. I am pleased to announce my safe landing in Moscow. How was your day?”

In the background, Will could hear the hustle and bustle of people in the airport and several announcements in a language he did not understand.

“Long. Longer knowing you’re not inside cooking dinner…” Will sighed. “I suppose I’ll survive. Might have to pick up some canned chilli to hold me over, though.”

Will used a playful tone and could practically hear Hannibal cringing. In a comically serious tone, Hannibal responded.

“Don’t you dare bring that toxic waste into our home, Will. I will fly back just to throw it out.”

“Oh, well, in that case, I’m definitely buying some just so you come home sooner.” He smiled, whistling at the dogs to come closer to the house, not straying from his line of sight.

Hannibal let out a soft grumble while taking his place in the backseat of a car, one Will assumed was hired by his Uncle.

“You’re a manipulative, cunning boy, Will.” He sighed. “For the time being, please refrain from buying… canned chilli… well, canned anything really and cook yourself something. In fact, I would appreciate a photograph of your meal the moment it is prepared. I have a funny feeling you haven’t eaten since this morning.”

Will could hear Hannibal’s disapproving smirk through the phone and couldn’t help but laugh softly.

“Yeah, yeah, you caught me. I’ll make something now.”

He made his way through their home and let the dogs know their Papa was on the phone. Hannibal let out a light tut, slightly annoyed with Will’s poor eating habits.

“I loathe to admit it, but I do miss them. Give Buster an extra treat at dinner for me, please. I always sneak him a little something special to keep his loyalties close. However, I suspect he simply expects it now.” Hannibal grumbled.

Will gasped dramatically and clutched his hand to his chest, “Unbelievable! I always saw you do that, you know. You aren’t as slick as you think you are.”

They both let out a soft chuckle.

As Will opened the fridge, Hannibal asked, “How is the new case going?”

Will let out a ragged sigh, chopping vegetables. “Alright. The guy is clearly obsessed with a girl, I suspect his daughter and is terrified of her leaving home. Gotta fly out to Minnesota tomorrow morning to interview a potential victim's family, so that’s fun. Hopefully, we get a lead.”

Will’s tone was rather flat and irritated. He hated interviews and, well, socializing in general.

“You’ll be fine. You’ve done hundreds of interviews, love. Do not worry. How long will you be gone from the dogs?”

“A few days at least. I’ve already asked Alana to look after them, luckily she agreed. I'm dropping them off in the morning on my way to the airport.”

“Wonderful, I’ll make sure to invite her for dinner to thank her. I’m sure the dogs will enjoy some time with Applesauce, too.”

“Yeah.” Will paused, unsure if he should ask, but continued anyway. “Are you nervous about seeing Mischa?”

There was a moment of silence before Hannibal spoke. “Terrified.”

“Do you know where she's been all these years?”

“I don’t know much at the moment, just that we were separated at the orphanage, and she was passed around so much that she fell between the cracks. To my knowledge, she hasn’t spoken to anyone except to ask if I was alive.” Will did not miss the soft shake in his voice.

“I’m sure she’ll be relieved to see you. Hopefully, you can get her home with us soon. I’ll work on getting the guest room ready for her, yeah?”

“I hope so. And yes, please. I will send you any preferences she may have as soon as I learn them. Thank you, Will. I appreciate it.”

Will smiled. “You don’t have to thank me, Hannibal. We’re family. She’s family.”

He heard a soft, cracked exhale over the small speaker in his ear. He could tell Hannibal was exhausted and could only imagine how overwhelmed with emotion he was. Never in a million years did either of them think they would find Misha, especially alive; he had spent several years mourning his sister, accepting her likely death. He watched as Hannibal’s world shattered at three in the morning, knowing there was nothing he could do to help him. Will continued to cook and quietly put one of Hannibal’s classical playlists on, hoping to offer a wordless comfort through the phone. The two stayed silent for a moment, content with the small world of safety they had created during the call. After a couple of minutes, Hannibal sighed.

“I have to go now, Will. I’ve just arrived at my hotel. Please call me before you go to bed.”

“I will. Love ya.”

“And I, you, Will.”

Will hung up and stared at his phone in solemn silence from the opposite end of the world of his partner. With a sad sigh, he finished cooking his simple dinner of chicken and veggies with rice without interruption. After calling the pack back in, he refilled their bowls with unseasoned versions of his meal and grabbed his plate, moving towards the dining room. He stopped when he saw the dining room table and quickly turned, taking his meal back to the kitchen, choosing to stand at the counter and eat in silence, unable to face his fiancé's absence at the head of the table.

To be continued…

Chapter 3

Hannibal exited the car, grabbing his bags before making his way to the front desk. A polite young woman greeted him, and provided him with his room number and key, wishing him a peaceful stay before he made his way upstairs. He felt like death on two legs and was desperate for sleep, praying to any deity for the elevator to move faster.

The suite was large and elegant, exactly what he expected from his Uncle. He quickly noted the sound of someone else in the suite and was immediately on edge. He took in a deep breath through his nose and instantly recognized the scent of his Uncle Robertus.

“Hannibal? Is that you?” The man called from somewhere within, accent thick.

“Yes, Uncle.” He took his shoes off, hung his coat and made his way in, finding his Uncle Robertus in the sitting area, book in hand. Hannibal presumed that he was awake, waiting for his arrival.

He felt a buzz in his pocket and pulled his phone out as he sat across from Robertus. It was early, 4:35 AM to be exact, making it 9:35 PM for his darling, Will, who had messaged him a photo of his meal. He shook his head, realizing how late he was eating.

>> See? I can cook. <<

<< Thank you, Will. A Cabernet Sauvignon would pair wonderfully with that. >>

>> Noted. Thank you. Do we have any aspirin? <<

<< Medicine cabinet in the washroom on the main floor. Are you feeling alright? >>

>> Thanks, just a headache. Keep me updated. <<

<< I will. Goodbye, for now, Will. >>

He slid his phone away, looking up at his Uncle while biting back a yawn.

“Where is she?” Was all Hannibal asked quietly, nervously rubbing thumb and forefinger together.

“She’s currently living in a psychiatric institution. She’s quite… unstable.” Robertus bookmarked his page and set the novel to the side.

Hannibal rubbed his hands together, trying to soothe his nerves.

“We will go to her tomorrow. For now, rest. You’ve had a long flight, and I’m sure you’re still in shock.”

The tall, elderly man stood, touching his nephew's shoulder warmly.

“Come, I will show you to your room.”

Hannibal stood wordlessly, picking his bags back up and following his Uncle. He hadn’t slept since the call with Robertus beckoning him to Russia, leaving him exhausted from the travel. They found his room, and Hannibal thanked his Uncle. The two shared a short nod and quieted goodnight before retiring to their respective rooms.

With a deep sigh, Hannibal sat on the edge of his bed. He leaned forward with his head in his hands, too exhausted to cry and wanted, more than anything, to simply be in his lover's arms. After several deep breaths, he rose and unzipped his luggage to hang his clothes.

He smiled when the case opened, and eyes met the well-loved copy of Inferno lying on top. He lifted it and held the poem to his chest, already missing Will more than he thought possible. Feeling the worn edges of the book, the corners of his mouth curled upwards, and he placed it on his bedside table along with his cell phone and room key.

Hannibal continued unpacking his luggage, carefully hanging his suits up in the armoire, ensuring they were colour-coded. Next, he refolded and tucked his pyjamas and loungewear away in the drawers alongside his undergarments. When he returned to the luggage to close it up and put it away, he noticed a Ziplock bag with a familiar piece of fabric inside at the bottom of the suitcase.

He felt as if he had stopped breathing momentarily when he recognized it as one of Will’s favourite flannels, often caked in a combination of motor oil, tree sap and dog hair. He slowly picked it up and cracked the bag open. The strong scent of his beloved poured out into the room, and Hannibal could feel his eyes gloss. He pulled the shirt free from the bag and held it close to his face, sniffing directly into the collar where his scent would be most potent. It was evident that Will had sprayed his cologne on the tattered shirt before hiding it away, and he had never been so grateful for anything in his life.

He sat on the edge of the bed holding the shirt to his face for several minutes, both soothing and irritating the ache in his chest he felt from being so far from Will.

Soon, he forced himself to carefully refold it and place it back in the airtight bag, unsure how long he would be in Moscow. He did not know how long he would need to remind himself of Will’s scent and knew he must preserve it for as long as possible. With the bag carefully sealed, Hannibal placed it under the blanket on what would be Will’s side of the bed and wiped his cheeks free from tears he was not aware had fallen, annoyed at himself for developing such intense emotions for the man.

Already, he was overwhelmed and felt crushed with loneliness. Being so far from Will was something he had not encountered during their relationship, and he has found it more difficult than he could have imagined. Never in his life did he think he could become so attached to another, not since Mischa.

On his bedside table, his phone lit up with an incoming call from Will. He could see his contact photo and smiled to himself. The picture had been taken during one of their trips to New York City to see a production of *La Sylphid* performed by the New York City Ballet. Will was dressed in a well-tailored navy suit that brought out the colour of his eyes. His dark chocolate curls were exceptionally untamable that day, and he reflected on the memory of the two of them in the washroom of their hotel, using every product available to try to get them to lay still. Eventually, the two gave up and caved to a fit of laughter, declaring it a lost cause; otherwise, they would be late. The photo was of the two of them smiling in their seats in their private booth. Hannibal loved the image for its memory and the beauty of Will's crooked smile, which he only showed when he was truly happy – a smile often only used around Hannibal and the dogs.

Without realizing it, he had missed the call from Will, wholly engrossed in the memory. He redialled before Will was able to finish leaving a voicemail. He picked up after a single ring.

"Hey, I thought you might have already been in bed. How're things going?"

Hannibal smiled as he heard Will climb into their bed. He put the phone on speaker so he could change into his pyjamas and join him. He was far too tired to wash the flight off of him.

"Alright, I suppose. I found your gifts."

"Oh, did you?" Hannibal could hear his smirk.

"I did, thank you very much. I must admit they were quite comforting to find."

"I'm glad." Will paused. "Have you seen Mischa yet?"

"I'm going to see her tomorrow. She's in a psychiatric facility and won't speak, much like myself after our parents died."

The sound of Will settling into his side of the bed came gently through the speaker, followed by the click of the dog's nails entering the room.

"I'm sorry to hear that… it's a good thing she's got a psychiatrist as a brother, huh?"

He could hear Will grinning through the phone. He settled into bed himself, pulling a pillow close to his chest and blankets over his middle. His free hand briefly caressed Will's shirt under the covers.

"Quite." He smiled. "I'm delusionally hopeful that my presence will somehow help draw her to speak. I'm unsure of her mental state beyond muteness, however. I can only imagine what she may have been through over the years."

"I'm sure you'll have an amazing impact on her. She needs you right now. You're the only one she's asked for."

"You're right… I'm just nervous she may despise me for not finding her sooner."

“You’ve never stopped, Hannibal. Hell, I’ve even used what limited privileges I have at work to look for her. It’s not your fault — she disappeared.”

“I know…” Hannibal sighed, smoothing out the blanket. “How are the dogs?”

Hannibal was desperate to change the subject.

Will breathed out a laugh, catching on as always. “They’re all snuggled up in bed with me ‘cause you’re not here to stop them.”

“Will.”

“Hannibal.”

“Will.”

“Hannibal.”

“You’re a monster.” Hannibal rolled onto his back, pressing his fingers to the bridge of his nose while smiling. “We’re going to have dog hair in our sheets for months.”

“Yeah, but you’ll forgive me.” Will was laughing. “I gotta stay warm somehow.”

Hannibal sighed, but it was not out of anger or frustration but instead that he was backing down.

“I’m backing down, but I’m not agreeing with you, nor am I forgiving you.”

“Yeah, yeah. The traitors miss you.” Will’s tone was playful.

“The traitors?” Hannibal questioned with a smile, eyes sleepily fluttering.

“Yeah, you know… all the other dogs we have. They flock to you 'cause you spoil them. The lot of them are traitors.” Will was laughing as he finished the sentence. Hannibal could imagine his love surrounded by the pack, shedding profusely and mussing up the bed. “They keep whining and scratching at your office door.”

“They’re not traitors, Will. They simply understand that I am the more loving father.”

Just as he had earlier, Will gasped dramatically. “How dare you say such a thing!”

Both men chuckled as they further settled into their beds.

“What time is it in Moscow anyway? Shouldn’t you be sleeping?”

Hannibal turned his head and blinked at the clock. “It is 5:26 in the morning. I suppose we should both get some shut-eye, yes?” The sun was already rising.

Will yawned. “Yeah, I gotta be up at 5-ish to get the dogs ready for Alana. I assume you’ll be up long before I am, but please text me and keep me updated. And — oh god — BUSTER!”

Hannibal could hear Will moving around in the bed, pulling sheets off of himself and the rest of the dogs moving around.

“Will. Will, what’s happening?” He couldn’t help but feel somewhat anxious, unsure if Buster was alright. Suddenly, he was wide awake.

“Fuckin’ dog…” Will groaned. “He’s shitting on the floor.”

Hannibal sighed in relief, laughing lightly, plugging his charger in and closing his eyes once more.

“This is what you get for letting them sleep in the bedroom, Will.”

“He’s just mad he didn’t get a special treat at dinner. Fuckin' Napoleon complex with this one.”

On the other side of the phone, Hannibal could hear Will moving around to clean up Buster’s mess and couldn’t help but smirk, knowing that the dog was acting out in his absence. It warmed his heart to know the dogs missed him, even if they showed it in strange ways.

Eventually, Will was heard washing his hands and muttering several curses under his breath before kicking all the dogs off the bed and instructing them to lay by the hearth in their bedroom.

“See, Buster? You ruined our slumber party for everyone.”

Hannibal chuckled and let out a soft yawn.

“As much as I’m enjoying these adventures with you, Will, I really must be getting to bed. I’m not sure when my Uncle will be waking me.”

“Oh shit, right, it’s like, 5:30 for you. Sorry.” Will climbed back in bed. “Goodnight, love.” They both yawned. “The pups and I miss you.”

“Goodnight, *Mylimasis*. We will talk more tomorrow. Please let me know when you land in Minnesota.”

“Of course. Love you.”

“I love you, too, Will.”

They hung up and laid their heads down with a sigh. Both men missed their other half, unready to face the horror of tomorrow. Both men struggled to fall asleep, only for it to be restless when they finally did. Both men wished for the embrace of the other.

To be continued…

Mylimasis = Beloved

Chapter 4

Hannibal woke up bathed in sunlight. The golden light streamed in through the windows and reflected off the pale walls and carpeting, making the room appear to be glowing.

Glancing over at the clock on the bedside table, he let out an exhausted huff, seeing it was 9:47 AM. He would have to face his reunion with Mischa on roughly 3 hours of sleep.

Hearing Robertus moving around in the sitting room, talking to someone on the phone, he knew he would have to rise and join him. He forced himself out of bed and into the en suite for a steaming shower. There were several moments where sleep almost captured him as his eyes drifted closed in the warmth of the water, but he managed to stay upright and awake.

Once cleaned and shaved, he dressed in a chestnut brown plaid suit and blue tie that reminded him of Will.

He joined his Uncle, welcoming him with a quiet "Good morning."

He took a seat across from Robertus and checked his phone for any updates from Will, despite knowing he was currently sleeping — it was almost 3:00 AM for him. He hoped Will was asleep. He never slept enough.

"Good morning, Hannibal."

In the daylight, Hannibal was able to see his Uncles age much clearer. It had been years since he last saw him, and the man was evidently not getting any younger. He now used a striking wooden cane with an exquisitely handmade silver handle and continued to wear his well-tailored suits. His Uncle was tall and shared the same features as the rest of the Lecter men in their lineage – high cheekbones and a strong nose. There were deep wrinkles around his eyes, mouth and forehead. 'A life well lived,' Hannibal thought, hoping to see the same reflected on himself as he got old with Will.

"When are we leaving and going to Mischa?" Hannibal asked, not caring for small talk and wanting nothing more than to lay his eyes on his little sister for the first time in decades.

"We will leave at noon and meet with her at 1:00 PM. Until then, *sūnėnas*, please order yourself something to eat. The food here is acceptable, even to your standards."

He nodded toward his Uncle, realizing he hadn't eaten since breakfast with Will. Robertus placed the menu in his nephew's hands and raised a brow waiting for him to find something to order. After perusing the breakfast menu and being rather displeased by the options, he ordered a simple omelette. Robertus ordered the same.

The two men sat in silence while they ate. Hannibal counted down the minutes until their departure.

At noon, the two Lecter men exited the hotel and got into a black town car. Hannibal sat quietly, fixing and smoothing his coat lapels and adjusting his cufflinks over and over throughout the drive, nervous about his reunion with Mischa. If Robertus noticed, he did not say so.

At 12:43 PM, they pulled into the long driveway and parked in front of the doors of the facility.

Behind those horrible white doors, his sister sat somewhere waiting for him. With a struggle, he unstuck himself from his seat and exited the car, walking forward on shaky knees. Once inside, a young man greeted them in Russian. Hannibal explained who they were here to see, and after a short smile and nod, he gestured them towards the waiting room.

The building smelt sterile, a potent mix of bleach and chemical cleaner. It irritated Hannibal's sensitive nose, but it was a small struggle he would endure for his sister's sake. The walls were painted a light, hospital green that reminded him of his days at Johns Hopkins.

Several minutes passed before an orderly came, beckoning them to follow. Both men rose, following the woman.

In his chest, his heart pounded. Hannibal could hardly hear above the sound of his blood rushing through his ears. He attempted to control his breath and maintain his mask but could feel its cracks. Misha and Will are his two weaknesses in this world. Being forced away from Will to try and revive his relationship with Mishca was painful. It terrified him, not knowing how he would react to seeing her and how his presence would affect her.

They rounded a corner and walked down a long, windowless hall, stopping outside room 204. Behind this final door was his sister. His breath caught in his throat, tears threatening to fall. Instead of stalling, he pushed it open and entered the room. All he wanted was to keep her safe – he would not fail this time.

Sitting in a chair was his darling Mishca. Her hair was still a beautiful honey blonde, and her auburn eyes were clouded with sadness, far away and focused on something outside. There were light signs of aging on her face, and her long, too-thin limbs were tangled up, knees pulled to her chest.

Hannibal took a step forward, readying himself. He cleared his throat quietly.

"Mischa."

She blinked and slowly turned her head, dark, heavy-lidded eyes looking at him, completely lost. She tilted her head slightly to the left, her long hair falling in front of her face somewhat.

"...Hannibal?"

To be continued…

Sūnėnas = Nephew

Chapter 5

Will woke engulfed in darkness; looking at the clock, he read it was only 4:18 AM. The sun was far from rising, and he desperately wanted to hide his head back in the pillows. Reaching out to Hannibal's side of the bed, he was disappointed to find it cold and empty; for a brief moment, he had forgotten Hannibal wasn't home. In an attempt to put off the beginning of the day ahead as long as possible, he hid his head back into the pillows, groaning, and tried to fall back asleep. It wasn't long before he gave up completely and rose from the bed. When he glanced at the clock, it read 4:21. He sighed, realizing he had only managed a few minutes of escape.

The pack of dogs was still huddled around the now dying hearth, snuggled close and snoring. Stepping over them carefully, Will stumbled into the washroom and turned the shower on to warm up while he relieved himself. He took his time in the shower, using Hannibal's expensive curation of products with a smug smile, cleaning off the thin sheen of sweat that covered his skin in his sleep.

He secretly preferred the products Hannibal bought, but he would never admit that to him. At Hannibal's request, he agreed to use the fancy bottles, especially now that they were living together, but he always put up a pretend fight. There was one time he 'threatened' Hannibal by putting one of his usual bottles of body wash in the washroom – he found it later that day in the garbage bin, emptied out to prevent him from putting it back.

He basked in the hot water, happy to know he did not have to reserve any for Hannibal, who often followed him with his own shower in the morning when they weren't sharing one.

Will exited the shower, scrubbing himself dry with a soft, fluffy towel, tossing it in the laundry bin and made his way to their walk-in closet. There, he found himself staring at his collection of shirts and turned to look at his partners. It wasn't often that he stole clothes from Hannibal's side of the closet, but he was feeling rather lonely and decided to put on one of his sweaters over a button-up, followed by a pair of dark trousers. He made his way to the back of the closet to get his duffel bag and started to pack for Minnesota.

Several undershirts, button-ups, and flannels were thrown in, with a few pairs of slacks and khakis. Will left the closet and soon doubled back to pack boxers and socks, thanking any and all Gods for not letting him forget.

Soon, Will was downstairs, letting the dogs out and sitting on the front porch with a cup of coffee. He looked around the vast yard, happy to know that he and Hannibal had found this house, which was nestled perfectly between Baltimore and Quantico.

Their home was set back and isolated enough for Will to be comfortable but close enough to the city to not impact Hannibal's social life and dinner party invitations.

They had found the beautiful two-storey Victorian last spring. It needed a ton of work to make it exactly what they wanted, but Will was more than happy to get his hands dirty. It features a wraparound deck and a sizable barn in the back where Will works on lures and

their boat. Further back on the grounds, hidden by trees, is a small cabin, which Will renovated, turning it into Hannibal's personal slaughterhouse. Although it was smaller than his previous space, it offered better flow and natural light, both of which Hannibal preferred, and therefore forgave the cottage for its size.

Will spent the summer renovating, and they had only been living in the house for the last month. The renovations were tough on his body, but he refused to pay anyone for a job he could do himself; Hannibal put up a good fight but ultimately lost to Will's frugalness, allowing the man to get to work.

He started with the kitchen, replacing the appliances and building his partner custom cabinets – the space was made exactly as Hannibal always wanted and featured the butcher's block from his house in Baltimore. After that came the washrooms, where Will put his plumbing skills to the limit and was forced to call in a plumber. He could remember the smug grin on Hannibal's face when he found him defeated and cornered in the en suite holding his hands up at the spraying water, clothes completely soaked through – Will did not miss the sight of Hannibal's eyes going up and down his body taking in the way his clothes clung to his frame.

That summer was sweltering, and he planned to put off working on the roof as long as possible, but, as is his luck, they got a ferocious storm one night, and a leak in the attic threatened to ruin the freshly sanded flooring. With great irritation, he climbed up and worked on it, ripping off the old and replacing it with the new. Down on the lawn, Hannibal sat under a large oak tree with the pack and a sketchbook or book, usually pretending to read or draw when in reality, his eyes were locked on Will's frame. Occasionally Hannibal would call up to him, beckoning him down for food and water.

When Will wasn't busy refinishing the floors, painting or restoring original pieces that belonged to the house, and Hannibal wasn't in the city treating patients, the two of them were often out antiquing or cooking together. Most of the furniture was from Hannibal's home, but a few pieces were taken from Will's, mostly books and knick-knacks. Together, they made the house a home, a perfect combination of the two of them.

The start of their domestic relationship was soft and wonderful in every way – it was everything Will thought he was incapable and unable to have in life. When he was with Hannibal, he was happy, safe, and loved, all of which he had never felt simultaneously in his lifetime. Will smiled at the thought and sipped his coffee, feeling the rising sun's warmth on his face.

Will dropped the dogs off with Alana and got back on the road, heading towards the airport. The sun blazed through the windows, nearly blinding him as he drove. He parked and met Jack and Dr. Schwartz at the gate, all sharing quiet greetings. Will did his best to avoid Emilie, not wanting to talk to her or meet her heavy gaze. Not a single cell in his body was interested in talking to her.

Jack stopped and dusted off Will's shoulder, sending dog hairs around him.

"You need one of those *rolly* things, Will. You're always covered in your dogs." Jack said sternly, using his hand to gesture at the hairs covering his jacket.

"Yes, *Dad*, I know." He rolled his eyes. "I have like, five, but I keep losing them. I don't know where Hannibal keeps his, and he won't tell me 'cause he knows I'll lose his, too." He smiled slightly at the thought of Hannibal and lowered his eyes back to the floor when Emilie spoke.

"It's a pleasure to see you again, Will. I hope to make a better impression on you." Emilie smiled, holding her hand out to shake Will's.

He shook it. "Yeah. Let's just, uh, just keep it professional."

"Of course, Will. Though, I do hope we can become friendly."

He nodded. "Mhmm."

If he was being forced to have a psychiatrist babysit him, he would be as petty and petulant as possible.

The three of them made their way through baggage and security, finally sitting in the waiting area. Will bought the cheapest coffee in his terminal and swallowed an aspirin with a sip. A headache was growing behind his eyes; he was overwhelmed by the sounds and people around him. Too many emotions, too much noise, and not enough space. He felt cramped and claustrophobic, breathing in and out as slowly as possible to try and stay calm. Will walked quickly back to where Jack and Emilie were, accidentally bumping into someone, coffee jumping in his cup and landing on him. He murmured an apology, blotting his shirt with a napkin while cursing under his breath. When he found an empty seat, he closed his eyes and tried to drown out the world around him.

The plane landed in Minnesota, and Will followed Jack in a rented car to their motel. Dr. Schwartz seemed to be going in a different direction in her own vehicle, likely towards a hotel of her choosing.

Once inside his room, he closed the door and slid down it, letting out a breath he didn't know he was holding. Pulling out his phone, he sent Hannibal a quick text informing him that he was alive and in his motel room. He did not wait for a response before rising, throwing his bags towards the dresser, flopping onto the bed, and passing out, not caring to undress or climb beneath the covers.

To be continued…

Chapter 6

Hannibal spent many years building shields, an entire fortress to keep the innermost parts of himself away from the world around him. Never was there a hair out of place or an emotion portrayed without permission; everything was planned and precise, every person a tool or toy. He never once expected to meet another who he could consider an equal, someone who could surprise and challenge him – but then he met Will Graham, and everything changed.

The second the man opened his rude mouth, Hannibal knew. There was an excitement in his chest that he had not felt in decades; he was intrigued by the strange, twitchy, hot-headed man that sat before him. He knew he should be offended by Will, with his abrasive attitude and irritation at the mere presence of Hannibal in the same room as him, but a strange urge to touch dulled the wash of annoyance that came over him. Hannibal wanted to touch Will, to feel the softness of his curls, the roughness of his hands, the feel of his skin beneath his hands – not to shape but to hold, to caress and pray to. In Will's eyes lay a darkness that spoke the same language as his, and he had every intention of serenading him.

He knew he had to keep this man at his side as long as he breathed and hoped desperately to forge a bond with him that would allow that. There was only one way that Hannibal knew how to show love, and he knew that Will would always find the hidden message in the artwork he proudly displayed to the world, now created with the sole purpose of talking to Will. The tableaus were already taking shape, and his mind sorted through his Rolodex, mentally cataloguing who he could use for his designs. Although most would consider murdering people and meticulously turning them into artwork as a peculiar way to court someone, he knew Will would appreciate it. And he did.

Will was quick to mark Hannibal as the Chesapeake Ripper, which filled Hannibal with both dread and anticipation. He had already set up traps and evidence to mark Will as the Ripper and had been mentally preparing himself to kill Will and stage a scene, just in case he attempted to turn him in. The dreadful pit that grew in his stomach at the idea of never seeing the profiler again made him sick in a way he did not understand.

So on the night that Will confronted him after dinner, while they unwound by the fire, he breathed a sigh, carefully rising to slip a scalpel into his sleeve under the guise of refilling their wine. He was prepared for a fight, even as his heart pounded in his chest. Light perspiration coated his palms as he turned and saw Will rise, approaching, holding intense eye contact, maroon and blue colliding. The scalpel slid into his hand, and he readied himself for attack as he was shoved against the wall, a smirk on Will's face.

"Who are you in love with, Doctor Lecter?" He asked him, head tilted, and eyes narrowed.

Hannibal steeled himself, preparing for rejection.

"Who do you think, Will?" He whispered, afraid of the omission.

Will blessed him with one of his rare, genuine, crooked smiles.

Just as he was about to plunge the blade into Will, their lips connected, and he hesitated; his entire body freezing. The knife fell from his hand, clattering on the floor beside them as he pushed his own hands into Will's curls, deepening their kiss. There was a moment where they stood, staring with bated breath, waiting for the other to attack, only for them to collide, all teeth and tongue, bites and bruises. Rough, well-worked hands made their way up Hannibal's chest and over his shoulders, then back down and under his shirt, ripping it open and sending buttons across the room. They fought in a fit of passion, moving closer and closer, never able to get close enough. They stumbled up the stairs, never once breaking contact, bodies undressing, sending clothes flying until every part of them was touching the other.

The walls that Hannibal had spent so much of his life constructing and maintaining crumbled immediately under Will's loving, possessive touch, oceans of emotion and yearning pouring out over them both as they clung to one another under the dim lights of his bedroom.

Hannibal committed the entirety of their lovemaking to his memory palace – a marble statue of Will proudly at the centre – the passionate sounds Will made continue to echo down the halls, his salty taste and earthy scent bottled on display, and the feeling of his body permanently etched onto his heart and hands.

That night they became lovers and never looked back.

For several weeks, he waited for Will to turn him in, but it never came. The FBI never knocked, and no one ever came for his arrest – Jack continued coming for meals, never once looking at him strangely. One night while they prepared dinner, he asked Will why. He watched as Will stopped chopping and stared off into middle distance for a moment, the silence making his chest tighten. Nothing could have prepared Hannibal for what he replied with.

"For the first time in my life, I don't feel… empty. I feel like I've learned to love and be loved in return. I don't think there is anything you could do to make me want to give that up."

Hannibal was shaken to his very core – he felt absolutely shattered and put back together all in the same breath. There were no words to describe the things he felt for the man before him, so he simply held him, pulling him close to his chest and promised he would never let anything happen to him.

There was a dark, childlike curiosity in the way that Will desired to know more about Hannibal's hobby. At every opportunity, he asked questions – needing to understand the inner workings of his psyche – how he chose his prey, how he stalks them and figures out when, where and how best to attack. He asked about how he managed to never leave DNA behind, which led to Will doubling over in a fit of laughter when he saw his plastic kill suit. There were a few instances where he even joined him in the basement, observing the process of dissecting and butchering; a sense of calm washed over him in these moments when he gained new knowledge and could fill a gap in his mind. One thing Will was endlessly curious about was how Hannibal curated and implemented his designs. To keep Will off of scenes before Jack dragged him there, he would take old case pictures and walk him through them.

Hannibal learned early on in their relationship how important information was to Will and promised to answer any and all questions he had; sharing information was almost a love

language between the two of them, and his openness had a tremendous impact on the relationship, bringing them closer than he had thought possible.

Will drew a line, however, in never joining Hannibal on his hunts. He never failed to indulge in their victory, though, and never batted an eye at the meals placed in front of him, often making jokes, asking, “Who are we eating tonight, dear?” And “So, what exactly did they do to deserve your ire?” which always made Hannibal chuckle and shake his head.

Hannibal grew to understand that Will disapproved of killing those who were considered rude by Hannibal’s apparent ‘insane’ standards, so he changed his demographic to better fit his lover’s agenda, preying on inherently bad individuals — rapists, domestic and animal abusers, and pedophiles. This added a new layer of complexity to their relationship. Will was not only amazed at the beauty of his tableaus but respected his vigilantism. The two would share a knowing smile over their meal and clink their glasses, knowing the world was now a better place.

Over the last four years together as a couple, Will has maintained his boundary, and Hannibal was happy to respect it. In turn, he received an abundance of love and affection from his counterpart and a promise to never let Jack get too close to the truth while they feasted on the bodies of corrupt individuals, knowing that in death, they finally served a purpose.

Hannibal had gotten comfortable in his new life with Will, one filled with love, comfort, and lazy Sunday mornings, a life where he could be himself, unmasked, without judgment. He spent so many years filled with anger, believing he would never find an equal, never be able to feel anything but rage and hatred. He believed that he died that cold winter in Lithuania, his heart frozen and buried in the snow. As always, Will proved him wrong.

This proved to be inconvenient at the moment; with a now thawed-out heart, he was riddled with uncomfortable feelings while gazing into his sister's eyes. She looked so small and fragile, like a teacup sitting on the edge of a table, about to slip and shatter. In her silhouette, he could see the young girl he remembered, and in the deep depths of his mind, a locked door pounded, desperately trying to open.

Misha sat in a light pink dress with white socks; with her pale skin and slow movements, she looked like a phantom, an apparition floating in the air, blurring around the edges. There was a small gleam of recognition in her eyes as she looked at him, but her mind was still far, far away.

He moved closer, feet leaden, and kneeled before her, pulling her into his arms.

“Mischa… *Mano mylima*.” Tears threatened to fall down his cheeks as he wrapped his hands around her back, one softly petting her hair.

She did not say anything but eventually lifted her arms to wrap around him. He broke, and his body shook with sobs, his head buried in the crook of her neck, breathing in her long-lost scent of lilac and wood smoke – a balm on his broken heart. Under his hands, he could feel her begin to wail, her cries further breaking his already broken heart. He petted her hair and drew circles on her back gently, cringing at the feeling of bone so close to the skin, doing anything he could to try and comfort the grown child that lay shattered before him. He stayed

on his knees, holding her tight and crying, refusing to let go of her frame and whispering to her that he was here now, never letting her in harm's way ever again.

Some minutes later, Robertus put a soft hand on his shoulder, only making him hold onto Mischa tighter, nearly growling at the man for daring to separate them.

“Hannibal, let go of her. Let’s all talk.”

With hesitance and an enormous effort, he reeled himself back in and pulled back, holding her head in his hands and putting their foreheads together.

“*Aš pasirūpinsiu tavimi, Mishca. Aš pažadu.*” He whispered, gently pulling her hair from her face and tucking it behind her ears.

Eventually, Hannibal pulled away and stood, wiping the tears from his cheeks with his pocket square. Robertus stepped forward, trying to pull Mischa into a soft, quick embrace. It dawned on him that Mischa did not know Robertus when she backed away, screaming. He rushed forward, taking her back into his arms, soothing her until she calmed down.

Hannibal looked around the small room, noting only the bare necessities – a bed, chair, dresser and window. He curled his lip in disgust, wanting to bring his sister home immediately, spoiling her with everything she could ever want. He eventually pulled back, still holding her delicate hands and sitting on his knees.

A nurse came in and gave her a cup of water and medication. Her head slowly moved, following the movement of the nurse, eventually landing back on Hannibal.

“She will not speak. We have tried everyth-” She informed the two men.

“Hannibal,” Mischa whispered, voice rough with disuse, cutting off the nurse.

His eyes quickly shot up to hers. Her eyelids fluttered but never really closed, something he saw Will do when he was particularly worked up and overwhelmed.

“I’m here, Mischa.” He gently squeezed her hands. She looked at them hesitantly before putting squeezing back. She was far too pale and thin for his liking, and immediately demanded to know her current diet and medications and requested her chart. All of which the nurse happily supplied, grateful for any help from the man.

With clinical eyes, he glanced over the papers. The staff were as unaware of her mental condition as he was. She had been found four months ago wandering the streets of Moscow, looking lost and crying in a blood-covered dress. There were several attempts at talking to her written out; her only response was asking for him. She is currently on anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medications and has been sedated several times due to screaming fits and night terrors. She is fed three times a day but rarely finishes her meals. He set it aside once he finished reading over the sheets a third time.

“What happened to you, *mylima*?” Hannibal asked, voice shaking and looking at his sister, seeing a broken child he didn’t save sooner.

Her lip quivered. She looked as though she was going to speak but looked at Robertus and the nurse and quickly shut her mouth, shaking her head. Her eyes grew heavy as her medication began to break down.

He asked to speak to her privately and looked back at her, head tilted and sitting closer to her, both hands holding hers once more.

Her eyes overflowed with tears once they were alone. Rivers of pain poured down her cheeks.

“He found me.”

“Who, *mylima*?” He was confused, anger already kneading a tough pit in his stomach.

Her lip quivered, a sob and scream tucked behind her teeth. She leaned in close, holding his eyes intensely, her own wide and full of fear. Within his hands, her own shook violently like a leaf in a tsunami.

“*Vladis*.” She whispered the name like a curse.

A red, hot fury surged through his veins. His hands trembled, and his face twitched with rage. *Vladis*, the man who led the group that killed their parents and tried to kill them. *Vladis*, the only man he had not succeeded in locating and killing. *Vladis*, who dismembered his parents and ate them, forcing them down their children's throats.

Vladis, the man who hurt his Mischa because he failed time and time again.

Hannibal knew what he had to do.

He would not fail Mishca again.

He had to eat him.

To be continued…

Mano mylima. = My beloved

Aš pasirūpinsiu tavimi, Mishca. Aš pažadu. = I will take care of you, Mishca. I promise.

Chapter 7

Jack and Will entered the Nichols' home to interview a possible victim's parents. After several minutes of questioning, the two men shared a hushed conversation, and the house was considered a crime scene. Jack immediately called in ERT.

Will requested to see Elise's bedroom, and upon opening the door, he found her cold, delicate corpse tucked into bed. Before her father could step in, Will ushered him out and closed the door, turning to stand at the end of the bed and take the scene in. Closing his eyes, he took in a shallow breath and let the pendulum swing, the crime building itself before him.

He watched as his body carried itself to the side of the bed, eyes watching a still-living Elise sleep. Slick darkness poured through him, and he climbed atop her, wrapping hands around her throat, wringing it like a wet rag. Not a single scream made it through the crush of her windpipe, and he squeezed until the light faded from her eyes; then, and only then, was he satiated.

The recreation cracked when another voice spoke – a voice that did not belong in this scene. Confused and anxious, he ripped his eyes open, a sharp pain stabbing directly into his frontal lobe. All around him, the rebuilt crime slipped away, slithering into the shadows. The feeling of Elise's pulse slowing under his hands remained on the tips of his fingers.

"Hey, got anything for us?"

Will glared at her and scoffed, a hand rising to rub over his face.

"I could have gotten more, but, uh, you interrupted Bev. You know I need to be alone for this." He gave a pained smile, crossing his arms. His hands felt uncomfortable and sweaty in the plastic gloves.

"Shit, yeah, sorry." She looked down at the dead girl. "Nervous about closing this one."

Jack entered the room with a frown on his face.

"Now, you know you're not supposed to be in here." Jack glared at her for not following direct orders.

"Jack, it's fine. I got what we needed."

"I found antler velvet in two of the wounds. I'm positive there's more in the rest." Bev quickly added.

Brain entered and stood on the opposite side of the bed from Bev.

"Hold on, excuse me. Look, deer and elk pin their prey, ok? They put all their weight into their antlers, try and suffocate a victim. That's how they would kill, like, a fox or a coyote."

There was a smugness in the way Brian presented the strange bit of knowledge. As always, Will ignored it.

“Antler velvet is rich in nutrients. It actually promotes healing. He may have put it in there on purpose.”

Jack, looking confused, crossed his arms.

“You think he was trying to heal her?”

“He wanted to undo as much as he could, given that he’d already killed her, then put her back where he found her. Whatever he did to the others, he couldn’t do to her.” He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose and squeezing his eyes shut. A headache pounded in his skull.

“Is this his golden ticket?”

“No.” Will shook his head, instantly regretting the motion. “This is an apology.”

As he left the scene and climbed into his car, he reached into his pocket and pulled out an aspirin. He swallowed it dry and started the car.

The following day, Jack knocked on Will’s motel door. He quickly dressed and let his boss in, sensing his frustration already.

“You respect my judgement, Will?” He asked, removing his coat and draping it on the back of the chair.

“Yes.”

“Good.” Jack sat down. “Tell me about our psychopath.”

Will made them coffee and sat opposite Jack, opening the blinds to let some light in. He swallowed an aspirin with his coffee and sighed, irritated with the light.

“I don’t know this kind of psychopath… I’ve never read about him. I don’t even know if he’s a psychopath. He’s not insensitive. He’s not shallow.” Will swallowed a too-hot sip of coffee.

“You know something about him; otherwise, you wouldn’t have said, ‘This is an apology.’ What is he apologizing for?” Jack folded his hands together, leaning forward, the cheap table creaking under the new weight.

Instinctively, Will moved back in his chair, rubbed his face and chewed on the inside of his cheek.

“He couldn’t honour her. He feels bad, which… defeats the purpose of being a psychopath.” Will shook his head minutely, annoyed.

“Well, what kind of crazy is he?” Jack took in a deep breath to calm himself. He’s spent enough years working with Will to know that yelling does not get him an answer, although it often doesn’t stop him from trying.

“He- He couldn’t show her he loved her, so he put her corpse back where he killed it. Whatever crazy that is.”

Will leaned forward and drank a large sip of his coffee, cringing at the burnt taste. In the back of his mind, he noted how much Hannibal spoiled him.

Jack's brows furrowed. “You think he *loves* these girls?”

“He loves *one* of them. A- And, yes, I think by association, he has some form of love for the others. For all we know, it could be a girl in some dissociative state trying to find herself or- or doesn’t know who she is. I don’t know.” Will took in a deep breath. “Whoever it is, they don’t want these girls to suffer. They kill them quickly and to their thinking, with mercy.”

“A sensitive psychopath? He risked getting caught so he could tuck Elise Nichols back into bed.”

Will’s eyes drifted up and met Jack’s briefly before he looked away, nodding.

“The next girl is gonna go soon. They know they’re gonna get caught, one way or another.”

Two days passed before forensics could provide a full report. No DNA was found on Elise’s corpse, only a small piece of metal. Once the type of metal was identified, Will was able to narrow down his search for interviews.

While he got ready that morning, he thought about how easy it was to work scenes when Hannibal was with him – he wasn’t afraid to look when he was there. Seeing Elise’s body and not having his paddle with him had sent him into a small frenzy. The whole night was spent tossing and turning, sleeping in small bursts before forgotten nightmares forced him awake. He was exhausted, with deep bags colouring below his eyes. So, when Will received a text from Jack notifying him that he would be deposed in court and that he would be forced to work with Dr. Schwartz today, he couldn’t help but groan like a child about to have a tantrum. He managed to put on a brave face and met her in the parking lot, climbing into his car without words, and started the drive to the first business on his list.

Dr. Schwartz offered Will a coffee, the cup displaying the logo of some fancy cafe. He accepted it, grateful for the caffeine after a mostly sleepless night.

“I’ve heard you have several dogs. Tell me about them?”

Will was more than aware that Jack had informed Emilie that his dogs were a safe topic to discuss.

He managed a small, polite smile. “I have six. Buster, Zoe, Max, Ellie, Jack, and Harley.”

“Quite the collector.” She smiled, her voice smooth and warm as honey.

“Yeah. They’re all rescues.”

“That’s very kind of you.” She paused to turn to him and smile. “What are they like?”

“To put it bluntly, they’re assholes who prefer my partner over me. I suppose I can forgive them, though. I’d pick him over me any day. What about you? Any pets?” He turned right at the lights.

“Yes, I have a snake. A yellow anaconda, her name is Jörmungandr, after a massive sea serpent from Norse mythology who is so large he eats his own tail.”

“A snake, huh? How big is she? Don’t Anacondas get to be pretty big?” He looked left and right before making another turn.

“Yes, she’s just over nine feet in length. She’s a beautiful creature.”

Will could tell that she was genuinely happy to talk about her snake. It was clear she was pretending to enjoy most things for the sake of professionalism — he could certainly relate – but not when it came to her pet.

After a beat of silence, Emilie spoke.

“So, what exactly will we be looking for?”

“At this stage, anything really. But mostly, anything peculiar.”

Emilie nodded as they rolled to a stop at a construction site. He put the car in park as she looked around.

After sifting through hundreds of documents and visiting two separate sites, Will seemed to find what he was looking for — an incomplete resignation letter. Interest piqued, she watched as he questioned the woman in the office for any information about Garret Jacob Hobbs. As suspected, she had nothing to add, so he gathered boxes and took them to the car.

Emilie found herself alone in the office and decided to play a game. She picked up a tissue, lifted the phone and dialled the number on the letter.

A young woman answered the phone, a voice she recognized.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Abigail, it’s Dr. Schwartz.” Abigail inhaled a soft gasp. “It’s been a long time. Are you listening?”

She let out a shaky breath. “Y- Yeah.”

“They know, dear. They’re coming.” She paused. “You know what to do.”

She hung up the phone and folded the tissue, placing it in her purse. Stepping out of the office, she pulled her coat closer to herself and made her way to Will’s car.

Once safely inside, Emilie pulled out a compact mirror and reapplied her lipstick. Pleased with her mask in place, she closed the mirror with a soft snap and leaned back in the seat, smiling to herself.

They drove to the Hobbs’ residence in silence. She could hardly contain her excitement.

To be continued…

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Short chapter... sorry!

After the mention of Vladis, Mischa shut down, succumbing to a fit of sobs and unable to say another word. He attempted to comfort her, but she was too frightened, and he was too livid to make any difference. Upon hearing her breakdown, the nurse and Robertus soon reentered the room, and both Lecter men were asked to leave.

Hannibal was restless while adjusting himself in the backseat. Outside, he watched several buildings pass, eyes settling on a stray dog while stopped at a red light. For a fleeting moment, he remembered Will, thought of him begging the driver to stop so he could bring it home; it soothed his rage somewhat. Before he could think of him a second longer, the light turned green, and they drove away from the mutt.

He refused to speak to his Uncle after leaving Mischa's room, not wanting to share his newfound knowledge. The moment they entered their suite, he walked straight to his room.

Angry at himself for not having the foresight to pack his kill kit – he would have to improvise. First, however, he had to locate Vladis Grutas. Mischa was found in the city, meaning the pig was more than likely still here. She had been covered in blood, and while he hoped the man was dead, he knew he was not, but it was likely that he was injured. He recalled the intersection where she was found, mapped his way there and took off.

Hannibal walked up and down the street before finding a bar with several suspicious-looking customers. He found a nearby bench and carefully examined the comers and goers, looking for an old, familiar face.

Hours passed, and the sun began to set. He reached his hand in his pocket to check the time to find his cell phone missing. Thinking back, he remembered leaving it on his bedside table. He cursed under his breath and pulled his wool coat closer to his body, forgetting how cold it got in Russia. Hannibal made a mental note to stop at a boutique and purchase an appropriate coat, already deeply uncomfortable with the crisp autumn breeze.

The idea of being here till the winter was unsettling; he hadn't spent a winter in this region of the world since he lost his family. If he had a choice, he would take Mischa and immediately

go home to Will, abandoning this corner of the globe, never to return. It could crumble into a bit of ash and bone for all he cared, as long as he had Will and Mischa.

He was too close to Lithuania. He could feel it in his bones, hear the screams of his parents calling to him through the woods. He could feel Mischa's small hands holding onto him desperately for warmth, her never-ending cries for the cold to go away ringing in his ears.

He pushed the thoughts down, latched the door in his memory palace that held them, added new locks, and turned his attention back to the bar. Unaware of the time, he would allow himself only a few more minutes in the shadows before calling it a night and heading back to the hotel.

He did not see Vladis.

Hannibal returned to the hotel at 2:17 AM, his Uncle likely already sleeping. He walked through the suite silently and washed the day from his tired and freezing body before climbing into bed. Opening his phone, he sent Will a short, sweet goodnight, instantly getting a response.

>> Goodnight. I hope seeing Mischa went okay… Sleep well, love. <<

<< Thank you, Will. It will be easier to talk about over the phone. Perhaps we can have a call tomorrow? >>

>> Sounds good. Call me whenever, I'll always pick up for you. >>

<< And I, you, Will. I hope the case is going well. >>

>> It's alright. Got a suspect, but nothing huge. <<

<< I see. I wish you the best of luck. Please try to get some rest. I'm going to try and do the same. >>

>> Good. You need it. Goodnight. <<

<< Goodnight. >>

Hannibal locked his phone, set it aside and laid back in bed. He rubbed his hands over his face, cringing at the feeling of his fresh stubble, and reminded himself to shave tomorrow morning before going to see Mischa again. In his mind, he made a mental checklist of things

he could buy to bring to her. As a child, she loved the colour yellow and rabbits and foxes. During their drive to the facility earlier that day, he had noted a shop with stuffed animals – he would stop there tomorrow and purchase one for her.

He would spend the rest of his days caring for her, providing her warmth and safety.

He would not lose her this time; he refused to.

To be continued…

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Another short chapter, sorry! I promise they will get longer soon :)

Louise Hobbs slipped through the door, falling like a comet as the door was slammed shut. Her throat was slashed, a river of red flowing over her front, pooling on the stones beneath her. Will rushed over, doing what he could to halt the bleeding.

“M-my dau-” She gurgled, blood spraying out over her lips.

“Shh… it’s okay.” Will tried to comfort her, knowing she would not survive.

His body shook as Louise Hobbs took her final breath, desperate hands holding onto his forearms, falling to her sides. Before he could sit any longer, he could hear a commotion inside the house. He quickly pulled his gun from its holster and kicked the door in. With pistol drawn, Will made quick work walking through the house.

“Garret Jacob Hobbs, FBI!”

Hearing a struggle towards the back of the house, he rounded a corner, entered the kitchen, and found Garret Jacob Hobbs standing with a knife to his daughter’s throat. Without thinking, his finger pulled the trigger, and scarlet washed over his face. Despite his best efforts, the blade sliced through the girls' skin, arterial spray covering the kitchen and Will himself.

His feet moved like magnets pulling him closer to Hobbs; the muffled sounds of his gun going off and wet gurgling hardly registered in his mind. He emptied his clip in Garret Jacob Hobbs’ body; the hollow click and lack of feedback brought him back to himself. Looking around, he took in the bloody mess, and his breath caught in his chest.

He kneeled over Abigail’s body, desperately trying to close the gaping hole in her throat. Hot blood poured over his hands, seeping through his fingers as she gasped, clinging to life.

“See?”

His body shook violently, ears ringing and hands going numb. He could only vaguely hear his ragged, anxious breaths.

“See?”

He looked over at the dying body of Garret Jacob Hobbs, eyes wide, meeting the killers. Hobbs stared at him head-on, piercing the most inner parts of him. He watched in awe as

blood poured from the wounds in his chest, staining his button-up, and he couldn't help but feel everything Garret had when he slit Abigail's throat.

He felt power, unlike anything he had ever felt before. He felt the kitchen knife in his hand, the worn wooden handle nestled in his fist. He could feel the heat of his daughter's back to his chest, her heaving, terrified breaths as she cried and begged him not to hurt her, her tears burning his arm as they fell from her cheeks like rain. He felt the easy glide of metal and flesh, her throat opening, a canyon overflowing with blood. He basked in her helpless screams and watched the blood fly, spraying over family photos and unfinished breakfast.

He felt powerful.

He wanted to kill again, to hold a knife to another and watch them die under his hands.

Desire pooled in his chest as he watched the life drain from Hobbs' eyes, his lifeblood pooled around his limp body in the corner. Both satisfied and disgusted in himself, he turned back to the girl he had just orphaned.

Emilie appeared beside him, her hand replacing his on Abigail's throat.

"I've called an ambulance, Will."

He nodded and stayed on his knees, blood seeping through his pants, eyes unable to leave the poor girl, both in concern and curiosity.

At this moment, he understood Hannibal in ways he never thought possible.

Some time passed before EMTs entered the room, asking him to leave. On shaky legs, he did, stumbling out the front door, passing Louise's corpse as it was being put in a body bag. He managed to find his way to his car and leaned on it while he emptied his stomach in the yard. He could only feel the blood cooling on his face and hands in the early autumn air.

EMTs checked him over while he stood, completely numb, eyes on the front door, unsure if he wanted to see the girl come out breathing or in a body bag. Soon, but not soon enough, the gurney rolled out, and he could hear her gasping for breath, her throat hidden beneath bandages. He swallowed, watching her pale body get carried away, Dr. Schwartz climbing in beside her.

He stood, shaking, until the scene cleared and the sun began to set.

Emilie sat beside Abigail, waiting for her to wake from surgery. She carefully watched the doctors and nurses as they came and left, never once leaving her side. She fell asleep in the early morning hours, holding the young girl's hand.

When she woke, she had a fleeting thought about Will and his well-being. He was clearly in a state of shock when she left him and knew she should go see him soon to maintain her professional obligation to the man. In his eyes was a darkness that she knew all too well and intended to cultivate it, nourishing that monstrous turmoil, reshaping the crippled form and pulling it to its full height.

First, however, she had to have a talk with Abigail.

It was several hours before Abigail woke, and Emilie was still hosting a personal vigil at her bedside when she did. When she realized that Abigail was waking, she put her phone away, moving to sit on the edge of the bed. She gently brushed the hair from Abigail's eyes and smiled at her.

"Hello, Abigail."

She stayed quiet, her eyes fluttering and lip quivering.

"It's been quite some time, hasn't it?" Abigail nodded, eyes groggy, while the drugs continued to wear off. "I must admit, dear, I am quite impressed."

Both women smiled at one another.

"Y-you are?" Abigail tilted her head to the side, trembling, tears streaking down her cheeks.

Emilie lifted a hand to wipe her tears away, shifting herself to better face the young girl.

"You did beautifully." She whispered. "I'm so proud of you, Abigail."

The young girl smiled up at her with glee, pleased to make Emilie proud.

"Thank you, Mother."

To be continued…

Chapter 10

The morning after Will killed Garret Jacob Hobbs, he was on a plane going home. He hadn't said a single word since spitting out the events to Jack and felt as if he would never be able to speak again. He swallowed down two aspirin and tried to sleep through the flight, failing as miserably as he had the night before.

The plane landed in Baltimore, and he drove home in a blur. He was running on nothing but coffee, aspirin and whatever adrenaline was still coursing through his body. He had messaged Alana before his phone died, asking her to bring the dogs back to the house and leave them in the backyard for him.

He pulled into the driveway, sighing when he saw Alana's car parked. He turned the car off outside of the garage and dragged himself out, making his way to the front door with leaden feet. Once inside, he dropped his bags and crossed the house, opening the back door to call the dogs in. Alana was sitting in the yard with them and looked up at him, smiling. The second she saw his drained face, her smile dropped, and she got up, coming over.

"Will, what happened?" She crossed her arms.

Will opened his mouth to speak, and nothing came. He simply shook his head, looked down and picked at the skin around his nails.

Alana called the dogs in, taking Will gently by the arm and walking him to the living room, sitting him down. The pack crowded around his feet, happy to see him, providing him with lots of much-needed love and kisses. Eventually, they grew bored of his silent praise and curled up on the rug around the empty hearth. Alana sat beside him.

"Did something happen during the case?"

Will nodded.

"I'm going to call Jack, okay?"

He nodded once more, pulling Buster into his lap.

She left the living room, closing the door behind her. He could only hear the muffles of her voice through the glass doors separating the rooms. Eventually, he pulled a blanket over himself from the back of the couch, wrapping it around his shoulders while pulling his legs up to cross them, settling Buster in the centre of his lap, holding him close.

After a few minutes, Alana came back in, sitting beside Will and tried to pull him into a hug that he pulled away from. He did not want her comfort nor her pitiful, clinical stare.

"I'm going to call Hannibal, okay? Jack said he's been trying to get a hold of him, but nothing yet."

He furrowed his brows, worried his bottom lip between his teeth and shook his head — he didn't want to be a burden to Hannibal, especially with everything going on with Mischa. He had called Hannibal before boarding his flight but ended it after a few rings, realizing he didn't know what to say.

Alana pulled out her phone, dialling his future husband's number against his wishes. She smiled anxiously at Will, tucking hair behind her ear and waiting for the other line to open.

He could hear the ringing, going on and on, eventually ending at a voicemail.

"Hannibal, it's Alana. Call me back as soon as you can. I'm sure Jack has left you some voicemails explaining what happened — I'm with Will. Again, please call me back ASAP."

She frowned at the phone after ending the call and sent off a message. From the corner of his eye, he could read it.

>> Hannibal, call me or Jack back ASAP. I'm with Will, but he's nonverbal. I know you have a lot going on right now, but he needs you. <<

The message delivered, and she locked her phone before he could see if it was read.

Alana turned toward him, and he stared into the cold, empty fireplace, burying his fingers in Buster's short fur.

He wanted desperately to talk, to ask her to leave, to thank her for watching the dogs, to call Hannibal and ask how his day was, how Mischa was, but felt as if his vocal cords were ripped from his body, left lying in the kitchen floor of the Hobbs' residence.

It had been a long time since he had last been like this.

A memory from his childhood formed in his mind, heavy and tough like well-chewed gum. It settled in the pit of his empty stomach, making him nauseous. When he got 'difficult' like this as a child, his father would smack the side of his head, demanding in a loud, stern voice that he talk. The smell of cheap whiskey on hot breath wafted over him as he closed his eyes – the figure of his father looming overhead, hand raised. He flinched, pulling into the corner of the couch, sending Buster roughly out of his lap when the hand made contact; when he opened his eyes, Alana took the place he believed his father to be, her hand held close to her chest as if a dog had snapped its teeth at her.

His breath caught, and his throat felt tight. Every fibre in his being had believed that Beau Graham was in the room just moments before, and while he knew that didn't make sense, that his father had died nearly six years ago, nevertheless, he could do nothing but cower in fear, waiting for the smack he knew was coming.

Only it didn't come, and when he looked up at Alana, there was a thick fog of worry that covered her face. He realized now that she had been attempting to brush the hair from his eyes and pulled back when he did. Her hands were now folded under her thighs, preventing her from impulsively touching him again.

“Is there anything I can do to help, Will?” She chewed on the inside of her cheek.

He shook his head, eyes darting to her cell phone when the screen lit up, buzzing to life. Hers followed, and she picked it up.

“It’s Jack. Just give me a second.” She answered the phone. “Hi, Jack. What can I do for you?”

He could hear Jack reply, sounding tinny through the small phone speaker.

“I need Will to write up a statement for the file so we can close it. He’s not picking up.”

“I’m sure it can wait a few days, Jack. He’s just been through a traumatic experience!”

Will picked Buster up and slowly stood on shaky knees, making his way to the foyer to get his laptop. The sooner he did the write-up, the sooner he could put this entire ordeal and its confusing effects behind him.

When he returned to the living room, Alana was no longer there. He curled up in his corner, pulled the blanket back over his shoulders, and got to work. Alana reappeared at the door five minutes later.

“Jack wants a write-up on what happened. I’m sorry, I couldn’t get him to back off.”

He simply shrugged her off and got to work on the file.

By the time dinner rolled around, he was finishing up, and Alana was calling Hannibal for the third time. Once again, she got no response. Her failed attempts at reaching the doctor worried Will, but he pushed it down, reminding himself that he was busy caring for Mischa.

“Are you hungry? I can make us dinner.”

He shook his head despite the gnawing in his stomach. He swallowed another aspirin for his pounding headache and sent the completed file to Jack, closing his laptop and removing his glasses with a sigh. He bowed his head in his hands, curls flowing over his eyes and fingers.

When he looked up, he saw Alana typing on her phone before she turned to go to the kitchen.

Exhausted, he decided to go to bed. Will grabbed a pen and paper, writing a note for Alana that he was going to try and sleep, leaving it on the coffee table. He grabbed his bags from the foyer and climbed the stairs, immediately dropping them in the bedroom.

He stripped down to his undershirt and boxers and crawled into bed, pulling the fluffy duvet over his head and curling up into a ball. The smell of Hannibal was fading fast, and he pulled the man’s pillow over, cuddling into it, desperately trying to retrieve the scent.

With the door closed and the safety of his and Hannibal’s bed around him, he finally cried. His body heaved as he sobbed. Heartbroken by the loneliness he felt, he wrapped his arms

around himself to provide faux comfort, pretending he was not alone and, as far as possible from the only person he cared for.

The only person who would understand the things he was feeling. The only one who wouldn’t make him feel like a monster.

To be continued…

Chapter 11

After a quiet visit with Mischa, Hannibal stopped in a thrift store to purchase some clothes that would help him better blend into the area where his sister was found. He disliked charity shops, and hated the idea of wearing strangers' clothes the way he had to in the orphanage all those years ago, but he had no other choice at the moment. After several minutes of perusal, he found what he needed and left, stopping at a coin laundry to wash them before going out that night.

He had been returning to the intersection Misha was found every night since reading her file, always with an eye out for Vladis. Thus far, his efforts have been fruitless, without any whisper of the man seen or heard. During these stakeouts, he would walk up and down the streets and around the block, occasionally stopping in shops and bars, keeping anyone from getting suspicious.

Within a few hours, his new clothes were clean and on his form. He drove and parked a few blocks south of the intersection and started his rounds.

Hannibal sat in the far corner of a dingy bar, staying quiet and hidden in shadow. The booths were a horrid pattern, covered in various stains, duct tape holding together tears.

At the bar, there was a group of young men, maybe university students. He watched them while they drank, yelling and laughing at one another. The bartender, a handsome man in his 30s, kept giving them annoyed glances but happily fed them shots when asked. On the opposite side of the room were two pool tables, both being used. On one side, a man kept flirting with a woman who was clearly not interested in him. He carefully watched the man, ensuring he did not get too close to the woman — fortunately for him, he eventually got the message and left her alone. He would live another day.

He spent hours people-watching from his corner, sipping on whiskey, which reminded him painfully of Will. Looking up at the clock, he saw it was close to 3:00 AM, and he decided to call it a night, paid his bill and left.

It was nearly four in the morning when he arrived back at the hotel. Careful to not wake his Uncle, he crept back to his room, exhausted. He quickly showered and changed into his pyjamas, climbing into bed. Hannibal picked up his phone that had been forgotten during his

stakeout and saw several missed calls and text notifications. Immediately on edge, he opened his voicemail.

Jack's voice came.

"Dr. Lecter, call me back as soon as you can. It's about Will."

Panic surged through his body as he listened to the next one.

"Hannibal, it's Jack. Call me back as soon as possible."

There were two more voicemails from Jack saying the same thing. He checked his call logs and found six missed calls from Jack, three from Alana, and only one from Will. Before he could call Jack or Will, a text from Alana came through.

>> I'm still with him. He's still nonverbal; I don't know when he ate last. I was making dinner, but he went up to bed. I don't know what to do, Hannibal. Please answer. <<

His body relaxed somewhat, knowing that Will was at least alive. He called Will's phone and immediately got voicemail. Hannibal dialled Alana's number, and she answered after half a ring.

"Hannibal, where the hell have you been?" She sounded drained and annoyed.

"Alana, what happened?"

He could hear Alana move around, the television playing quietly in the background.

"Will… killed a suspect."

Hannibal's breath caught in his throat, excitement and dread pooling in his chest. Will doesn't kill; he never has, and to Hannibal's knowledge, never would.

"Is he okay?"

"I don't know… physically, yes, he's fine, but he hasn't said a word to anyone but Jack, and that was this morning. As far as I know, he's upstairs sleeping. He shot Hobbs ten times, Hannibal. Ten."

"He's never shot anyone before, Alana. What happened to make him pull the trigger?" Hannibal stood, pacing the room on socked feet.

"I- I don't know. I know he's pretty shaken up, though. He was curled up on the couch earlier, and I went to push hair from his eyes, and he backed up like I hit him… He looked so scared of me."

Hannibal took in a deep breath, pinching the bridge of his nose in worry.

"Can you see if he's awake, please? I would like to speak with him."

“Yeah. Yes, of course.”

Over the phone, he heard her move blankets and walk up the stairs. In the background, he could just barely hear the clicks of the dogs' claws as they followed Alana. A soft knock came through, but he heard no response. There was a heavy pause. He suspected she had opened the door and entered their bedroom.

“Will? You awake? I’ve got Hannibal on the phone.” She whispered.

There was no audible response from Will.

“Will?”

Nothing.

“Hannibal, he's asleep.”

More than anything, he wanted Will to wake up and talk to him, but he paused. Will never slept enough – he was sure he needed it.

“Okay… please have him call me in the morning.”

“Of course, Hannibal. Are things going okay there? Will hasn’t told us what happened.”

“Fine. Just have him call me, please.”

“No problem. Have a good night.”

“You as well.”

He hung up the phone, staring at it.

Hannibal squeezed his eyes shut, as tight as possible and took in a deep breath, holding it for a moment before slowly letting it out. His chest was tight, and his heart pounded.

He felt like he couldn’t breathe.

To be continued…

Chapter 12

The body of Elise Nichols hung in the air, impaled on antlers. Crimson blooms spread across her white nightgown as she drifted closer to him in the vast emptiness surrounding them.

Her lifeless eyes gazed upon him as she lifted her head. Slowly, her pale body floated above his own, hair falling in curtains around his head. Her wounds dripped cold blood onto him as he struggled to move. As she opened her mouth, congealed, dark blood poured out, spilling over his paralyzed body.

"See?" She whispered, sour breath blowing over his face.

With a shout, Will woke panting, covered in sweat. It was dark, and he couldn't see. His hands grasped around at the sheets, struggling to pull them from his frame, lungs working to fill. Panic surged through his body when he remembered that he was alone, Hannibal far too far from him to help calm him. Nausea rippled through his stomach, forcing him to take as many deep breaths as possible. Struggling, he freed himself from the bed and stumbled across the cold wooden floors into the washroom, collapsing in front of the toilet.

He spent several moments dry heaving, tears streaming down his cheeks. He pulled himself up, trembling as the sweat cooled on his body, and faced the mirror. Looking at his reflection, he felt detached and apathetic – he did not care for the man before him. He looked away before he could meet his own eyes.

Stripping his t-shirt, he left the washroom and grabbed towels, laying them on the sheets before climbing back in. Shivering, he quickly wrapped himself in another towel and pulled the comforter over it. Eventually, his eyes drifted closed, and he fell back asleep.

The next time Will woke, the sun was beginning to rise, but only just so. He glanced at the clock – it read 5:16 AM. Will huffed and dragged himself from bed and into the washroom. Turning the shower on, he stripped the boxers from his body and climbed in, rinsing the residue left on his frame.

After showering and dressing, he tidied the bedroom, picking up the clothes he had left on the floor and stripping the bed. Remaking it nowhere near as nicely as Hannibal, he grabbed the laundry bin and went to the laundry room.

He made his way through the main floor, whistling for the dogs to join him out in the yard. He didn't realize that Alana had spent the night, and when he saw her standing in the kitchen making tea, he nearly attacked her.

"Christ, Alana… I didn't know you were still here."

She smiled apologetically. “Sorry, Will. I felt uncomfortable leaving you alone all night, so I spent the night in the guest room. I hope you don’t mind.”

“No, of course not. I just- I didn’t realize, that’s all.” He looked at the floor, avoiding her eyes.

She put her cup on the counter, walking to the stove.

“The water’s still hot if you want a tea?”

“That would be great, thanks. I’m just gonna let them out.”

Leaving Alana in the kitchen, he opened the back door and stood on the porch for a few minutes, breathing. He watched the dogs run around and noted the chill in the air – he would have to pull out their sweaters and booties soon.

Soon, he called them back in, wiped off their wet paws and reentered the kitchen to start making their breakfast. The tea Alana had made for him was ready, and he happily took a sip, sitting on a barstool at the island counter.

“It’s nice to hear you talking again.” Alana smiled at him over the lip of her cup.

“Sorry… I have a hard time, uh, talking sometimes.” Will could feel warmth blossom in his cheeks on the ends of his ears. He looked into his tea, willing his body to relax, reminding himself that Alana wouldn’t hit him as his father did.

“No need to apologize.” She gently placed her hand on top of his. Will pulled away, bringing both hands around his cup for a sip. “I was talking to Hannibal last night. He wants you to call him.”

Will nodded and tried to remember where he left his phone. He portioned off the dogs’ breakfasts and set them out before rising from his seat. He walked to his coat in the foyer and pulled it from his pocket. Trying and failing to power it on, he cursed under his breath and ran upstairs to get his charger. He came back, plugged it in on the counter and took his seat at the island again.

“Do you wanna talk about it?” Will didn’t have to look up to see the worry in her eyes.

“No, not really.” Another sip. “Not much to say.”

Will reflected on the day in question, jaw clenched and hands tight around the teacup. His brows furrowed in realization.

“Someone told him we were coming.”

“What do you mean, Will?” She came around the island, taking a seat beside him.

Without turning to face her, his eyes focused on his cell phone.

“The wife was thrown outside as we pulled up. He- he knew we were coming. He knew his time was running out – what I don’t understand is- is how.”

Alana pulled her phone out and messaged Jack, relaying the information.

“Jack said he’s going to have someone look into it.”

Will nodded and took a sip from his tea.

Will let his phone charge for a good thirty minutes before calling Hannibal. During this time, he provided Alana with enough comfort in his well-being for her to leave. After she left, he reached into his coat pocket and pulled out the nearly empty bottle of aspirin, swallowing one down to drown out the pounding headache behind his eyes. Happy to finally be alone and at home, he took his phone, started a fire in the living room hearth and curled up on the couch, sitting with knees to his chest. Once his headache dulled, he called Hannibal.

He picked up after three rings.

“Will, darling, are you alright?”

He could hear the worry quiver through his voice.

“Yeah. Yeah, I think so.” He paused, unsure what else to say.

“Are you sure?”

“Honestly, no, but I will be.”

“What happened?”

He could hear people walking by Hannibal, the distant sound of beeping.

“Are you with Mishca right now?”

Hannibal paused. “Yes.”

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry. I’ll call you back later. Sorry.”

The red heat returned to his cheeks, upset that he had pulled him away from his sister.

“Will, it’s quite alright-”

“No. No, no. Go spend time with her. I- I’ll call you later. Love you.”

“Will-”

He hung up the phone before Hannibal could say anything else and turned it off.

To be continued…

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal pulled his phone from his ear and stared at it, confused. He called Will back and instantly got voicemail.

“Will, please call me back when you get this. Please do not feel like you’re pulling me from her – you’re not. I asked you to call me, knowing it would likely intervene with my scheduled time with Mischa. Please call me back.”

He hung up, slid his phone into his pocket, and returned to Mischa’s room. Today he brought her some dresses, sweaters, pyjamas and socks, hoping to provide her with comfortable and warm clothes. Yesterday, he had brought her a stuffed animal, one of a fox that resembled one from her childhood. She held it tightly to her chest, refusing to let go of it, not that he wanted to take it from her.

Mischa wasn’t being difficult – she wasn’t having tantrums or meltdowns – she was just silent. She never made a sound and hadn’t spoken since that first day he came to her, no matter how much he poked and prodded. Her silence was maddening and provided him with sympathy for his Uncle, who had dealt with himself in the same state decades before.

Each day, he spent two to three hours with her, working on rebuilding their relationship. He brought puzzles and books, often reading to her in various languages. Tomorrow, he would bring drawing materials and attempt to teach her – something he had always wished to do.

For today, however, he simply sat with her, brushing her hair and carefully braiding it back. Before leaving, he kissed the top of her head.

“*Aš tave myliu*, Mischa.” He whispered into her golden hair. “I will see you again tomorrow.”

With great strength, he left.

On his way back to the hotel, Hannibal stopped at a boutique to purchase a weather-appropriate coat, hat and gloves. After a moment of consideration and perusal of the shop, he found winter items for Mischa; a beautiful light grey overcoat, a fur hat and fur-lined leather gloves. He had also found a scarf that would pair perfectly with Will’s eyes and added it to the pile. Once he was happy with his items, he packed them in the trunk of his rented car and drove to the hotel.

When Hannibal entered the suite, he was met with several pieces of luggage by the door. Confused, he walked in further, finding his Uncle on the balcony, talking on the phone.

Hannibal sat, waiting patiently.

When his uncle entered the room, he stopped momentarily to look over Hannibal. Hannibal, in turn, looked at him with a tilted head, not converting a single emotion.

"*Sūnėnas*, I'm going back to France."

He watched as Robertus walked and sat in the chair opposite him, resting his cane on his thigh.

"Why is that?" He questioned, curious.

"You, nor Mischa, need me here. The child won't even speak, and when she did, I had to leave the room first. Clearly, she does not want me, so I will no longer burden her with my presence." He finished his statement with a nod.

Hannibal's eyes narrowed slightly, annoyed. He recognized the wording and tone from his childhood; his Uncle often tried, and failed horribly, to manipulate Hannibal, this time into begging him to stay. Hannibal refused to play his games then and would continue to reject them now.

"Very well." He stood, smoothing out his suit jacket, rebuttoning the single button in the middle. "Safe travels, *dėdė*."

No matter how long Robertus had lived with him, he had never seemed to adapt to Hannibal's lack of emotion or willingness to play his petulant mind games. His uncle let out an irritated sigh as Hannibal left the sitting room to pack his bags. He would no longer stay at this hotel – he wanted to be closer to Mischa.

Robertus left the hotel without a word, having his bags carried out by staff. Given his uncle's advanced age, it was likely that this would be the last time they saw one another. Hannibal found himself not caring.

Within a few hours, Hannibal found himself in a hotel much closer to Mischa. The restaurant was far superior to the last hotel, not that he would be ordering from them much as his suite came with a small kitchen. His room was on the top floor, featuring large windows overlooking the city below. Once settled, he checked his phone, hoping for a message from Will, but found nothing. He decided to send him a text.

<< Will, please call me. I'm not going to see Mischa until tomorrow afternoon. >>

He waited several minutes, but the message never delivered. He pocketed his phone, irritated, pulled on his gloves and left the suite. Hannibal drove around and found an art supply shop which supplied his preferred materials; he purchased two sketchbooks and two packs of pencils. He continued his adventures around Moscow, eventually finding a fine foods grocer and buying the bare necessities he needed.

Around 1:00 AM, Hannibal felt his phone ringing in his pocket. He leaned back into his seat at the bar he had been staking out and pulled it from his pocket, seeing it was Will. He immediately picked up.

"Hey… I didn't wake you, did I?"

"No, my love. Are you alright?"

"I don't know, honestly." Will paused. "I don't even know how to talk about it."

Hannibal got up, left more than enough cash to cover his bill, and exited the bar. He pulled his coat closer to his body as he faced the cold air and started the walk to his car.

"Explain to me what happened. All I know is that you killed a man, Will."

There was a pause. Hannibal closed his eyes, mind placing him and Will in his office, sitting opposite each other.

"Y- yeah… I found the Shrike, and he had killed his wife and was about to, um, about to kill his daughter." In his mind palace, Will looked away, hands stretching to relieve tension in his fingers. "I don't know what made me pull the trigger. I've never shot anyone, you know that, but I just did and- and *I couldn't stop*." There was a nervous and shameful layer to his speech.

"How many times did you fire, Will?" He already knew the answer but wanted Will to admit it aloud.

Will had soft tears filling his eyes, drowning the very thing that provided him with his gift of *seeing*.

"I emptied my clip. I shot him ten times." Walls and forts began to build themselves quickly, skewing the vulnerability he was giving and masking it behind something softer. He was shutting Hannibal out, as he often did.

In an attempt to blow a hole in the structure surrounding his mind, he continued with a softer question.

“Did the girl live?” Hannibal asked, legs crossing at the knee, fire crackling in the nearby fireplace.

“Yes.”

There was an indecisiveness in Will’s tone, as if he couldn’t tell if he was happy about the fact.

Intrigued, Hannibal continued. “How did killing the Shrike make you feel, Will?”

Finally meeting his eyes, Will’s burned bright like the tips of a long burning flame. With voice shaking, he simply said, “Powerful.”

To be continued…

Aš tave myliu = I love you

Sūnėnas = Nephew

Dėdė = Uncle

Chapter End Notes

It's my birthday! <3

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Since it's my birthday, I decided to share a second chapter today! I hope you enjoy it. <3

THREE WEEKS LATER

Will's mind had been drowned in a thick fog for weeks, a splitting headache coming in waves that were only numbed by copious amounts of aspirin being added to his barely existent diet. Each night he struggled with sleep, constantly waking soaked in sweat, with bated breath. No matter what he tried, Hobbs haunted his sleeping mind. He was exhausted.

He knew he should go to a doctor, knew that Hannibal would force him to had he been there, but he couldn't bring himself to leave the house for anything besides work and therapy with Dr. Schwartz – even letting the dogs out felt like a chore. All of his necessities were delivered to their home, limiting the need to go out.

Will thought about the worried crease that formed between Hannibal's brows while on their video call last night when he explained the never-ending stream of nightmares. He neglected to go into full detail, deciding to keep some of the man-made horrors of his subconscious to himself and chalked it up to stress. Hannibal had insisted he draws a firm boundary with Jack, but both men knew he wouldn't, no matter how much he wanted it.

Thinking about the worry Hannibal exhibited gave him the strength to pick up his phone to make an appointment with his doctor. Just as he was about to press 'call,' his phone began to ring, Jack's name in bold at the top of the screen. With a sigh, he answered.

"Got a new case. Get here as soon as you can." That was all Jack said before hanging up.

Will closed his eyes for a moment, took in a deep breath and pulled himself from the couch and out the front door.

He never called the doctor's office.

The scene was grim, to say the least. A family sat at the table, slaughtered and wasting away with their final, uneaten meal. Will looked around the room, a flicker of pain behind his eyes making itself known, and eyed the blood-splattered family photos. A knot formed in his

stomach as he looked from the smiling-faced children to their pale, lifeless forms bent over the table, blood pooling on their plates.

He turned his body to the crime and took his seat at the head of the table, letting the pendulum swing.

Before him, the blood retreated, returning to the bodies, their forms slowly sitting upright and turning their attention to him. He wasn't invited here, no, but he is the guest of honour. Looking around, anxious faces stare back; no one has taken a bite of food. Nobody leaves the table, all too scared to move, so much so that even the little ones behave themselves. Will looked around the room – he brought his own family to this home invasion. This family controls the Turners with threats of violence, threats that turn to action.

The Turner family is executed simultaneously, with the exception of Mrs. Turner, who dies last.

Will shoots Mrs. Turner.

"This is my design."

"What do you see, Will?"

Jack's voice shatters the silence, destroying the illusion.

"Family values."

"Mr. Frist and the children killed first, saving Mrs. Frist for last. Same as the Turners."

Will cringed, looking at the scene. "Not exactly the same. Something went wrong."

Beverly joined them, Brian and Jimmy close behind.

"Not a single present under the tree for Mrs. Frist."

Will sighed. "He took her presents; he took her motherhood."

Brian stood over Mrs. Frist's body. "Shooting her once wasn't enough. The first bullet travels beneath her scalp…" His hands followed the path the bullet took "to its final resting place, the base of her neck."

"And it still didn't kill her." Jack's arms crossed over his chest, lips pursed.

A spark lit behind Beverly's eyes.

"Hydrostatic shock of the shell hitting her skull would have caused brain damage."

Will nodded along, realization entering his mind. “Her body went into convulsions.”

“He shot her again,” Brian added. “Put her out of her misery, different gun.”

Jimmy shifted on his feet. “So, someone else shot Connor’s mom.”

“So, who is our additional corpse in the fireplace?”

“I’d say Connor Frist,” Will stated, wiping his hand over his face with a sigh. “He’d been prepped to shoot his mother, not watch her suffer.

“Connor couldn’t put his panic back in the bottle. So he got shot too.”

Will stared at Connor’s burnt body, an ache forming in his chest. “Whoever shot him… *disowned* him.”

Will was looking at missing children’s files when Beverly suddenly appeared beside him. He didn’t remember hearing her come in or anything that she had been talking about. He blinked at her a few times, feeling as if he had just woken from a deep slumber. There was a deep sense of dread and confusion deep in his stomach; he felt lost.

“What are you looking at?”

He turned his eyes back to the files on his desk.

“Both these kids are small, underweight for their age.”

“You think there’s a connection?”

Will ran his hands through his hair and over his face. “I’m thinking possible ADHD diagnosis for both boys. Ritalin, Focalin, any medication containing Methylphenidate can affect appetite and slow long-term growth in kids.”

“Another thing about Willard Wigan… he had a lonely childhood. He used his tiny sculptures as an escape.”

Confused, Will looked up at Beverly. “Who’s Willard Wigan?”

She simply smiled at him and straightened up, no longer leaning on his desk.

Ignoring his question, she continued. “Price got a hit on the ballistics matching program he’s been running on the two family murders. The bullet that put Mrs. Frist out of her misery matches three used in a murder in Bangor, Maine, a year ago. Mother of a thirteen-year-old boy shot to death with her own gun.”

“Thirteen-year-old milk carton material.” He sighed, heels of his hands digging into his eyes, attempting to alleviate the pain bursting behind them.

The more connections made between missing boys and this case, the more Will could feel the memories of his childhood itch at him. Old memories of yearning to leave home, wishing he could leave it all behind and start fresh, to change his name and never look back, resurfaced. It wasn’t often he thought of his childhood, and when he did, it was never easy.

He could feel the Southern heat boiling under his skin and the mottling of bruises along his body that never seemed to end. A thick scent of salt water and engine oil followed him around, and with every sip of whiskey, he could feel his father’s breath on his neck, his voice reminding him to sit up straight and mind his manners. More than anything, he wanted away from that man.

The day Beau Graham died, Will celebrated silently, drinking half a bottle of whiskey on the back porch and pouring the rest into the dirt in honour of the deceased man.

The Lost Boys case was taking a toll on him – mentally, emotionally, psychologically and physically. He couldn’t remember the last night he slept peacefully; it must have been the night before Hannibal was called away. When he did sleep, he was haunted by Garret Jacob Hobbs, the drunk, stumbling figure of his father or a variety of dead girls he failed to save. He wasn’t eating properly; he wanted to eat, horribly so, but he couldn’t bring himself to without feeling nauseous.

Beau Graham had started seeping into his waking life now, his voice nagging at the back of Will’s skull. He felt as if he had another person in his body.

A pattern formed. Bangor, Maine. Stamford, Connecticut, and recently Reston, Virginia, all murders taking place approximately five hundred miles from the one before it. The shooters were minors, middle children from traditional affluent families, and they were moving south. The most concerning pattern formed: capture bonding. A passive psychological response to a new master has been an essential survival tool for a million years. Bond with your captor, and you survive. You don’t… you’re breakfast.

Brothers looking for a mother, yes, but there was more to it than that.

There’s an adult with some formative sway, a woman, a mother figure looking to form her own family. Whoever this woman is, she wants these children to burst with love for her.

She has to erase their family to do that.

Within the week, the Lost Boys were found. It was easy to take them down, and Will was thankful that there as no casualties – the last thing he wanted was to see more dead children.

The woman, Eva, who was claiming to be their mother, was shot by Beverly expertly through the trees. Christopher was unable to pull the trigger on Will.

Will sits in his usual cream-coloured chair in Dr. Schwatz's office, wanting more than anything to simply leave. He debated getting up and pacing around the room, but it wasn't quite as large as his Hannibal's, making physical distance difficult.

Emilie sat across from him, hand poised delicately beneath her chin, pretending to hold it up. She gently crossed her legs and looked at him head-on, tilting her head.

"Tell me about your mother, Will."

"Some *lazy* psychiatry, Doctor Schwartz. Low-hanging fruit." The words were spat out, filled with venom and hatred.

Will worked his jaw, nostrils flaring at the idea of discussing the absent hole in his childhood where a mother should have been.

"I suspect that fruit is on a rather high branch, then, hmm? Very difficult to reach."

Will sighed. "So is my mother. Never knew her."

"That sounds like an interesting place to start." She smiled at him, a thin, clinical curve of her lips as her hand gathered a pen and notebook.

"I disagree."

"Why are you so disconnected from the concept of family, Will?"

"There's something so foreign about family… like an ill-fitting suit. Grew up without a mother and an overworked father. Never had siblings or distant relatives – makes it difficult to connect to something you never had."

He could hear his teeth grinding away and light perspiration forming on his palms. Will rubbed his hands against his thighs, glancing around the room to avoid Emilie's prying eyes.

“And yet, you have created a family for yourself,” she countered.

“I’ve only connected a family of stays, Doctor.”

“I was referring to Hannibal. Tell me about the Turner family; were they affluent, well-to-do? They lived like they had money.” She paused. “Did your family have money, Will?”

Will cringed at the memory of hungry nights and sweaty days, remembering the countless times he opened a cupboard hoping to find food, only to find a layer of dust. His stomach churned at the thought, grateful for his future husband’s near-pathological need to have the pantry fully stocked at all times.

“No. We were poor. I followed my father from the boatyards of… Biloxi and Greenville, to lake boats on Eerie.”

Emilie hummed. “Always the new boy at school, always the stranger.”

“Always.” Will nodded, wiping his hands against his pants again, a bitter smile stretched across his face.

“What grudge were these boys harbouring?”

“Motherhood.”

“And do you relate to these ‘Lost Boys’ Will?”

Will paused, rolling his neck as he thought of his answer.

“Yes. I think so, in some way.”

“Tell me why.” Her long, manicured fingers snaked around the fountain pen she fiddled with.

Will glanced at the clock, seeing that his session was almost up. He peeked at her notebook and saw a blank page. *Strange*.

“I often wanted to run away from home growing up. Wanted to disown my father and the notion of family altogether. Before I worked up the courage to, I was eighteen and out on my own anyways. In a way, I’m… envious of these boys. They made their own family, even if it was a sick, twisted perversion of it.”

Emilie hummed, acknowledging his comments.

“Did you wish to kill your mother, Will? For abandoning you?”

Will blinked slowly, his heart fluttering in his chest.

“I- Of course not,” he lied.

“Will, you can be honest with me. This conversation will remain within these four walls.”

There was a strange tugging in his body that yearned to be honest, to tell her the truth. Pushing tears away, he did just that. “Yes.”

“And your father? Did you wish to kill him growing up?”

A small, sick smile formed on her blood-red lips. Will swallowed, a knot forming in his throat.

“Every single day,” he whispered. It was wet and full of shame, cracked at the centre and bruised all over.

Dr. Schwartz brushed a stray hair from her eye and smiled wider.

“I cannot help but understand your anger, dear.” She spoke low and hushed as if the two were sharing secrets.

She rose from her seat, taking a few unhurried steps towards him, heels clicking on the hardwood floors. Will followed her movements with fluttering eyes and shaking hands. Emilie sat on the arm of his chair, softly resting her hand on his shoulder. Her hands were cold, sending a chill down his spine and through his body.

“How would you have killed your parents, Will?” Emilie’s voice was so soft he struggled to hear her; he had hoped he had misunderstood the question.

Will looked away, twisting his hands in his lap anxiously. Blood rushed through his ears, a light ringing sounding.

“D-Dr. Schwartz… how is this going to help me? How is any of this relevant to my therapy?”

Her thumb drew slow circles into his shoulder. He pulled back, standing abruptly. Emilie simply looked up at him, a soft look in her eyes he had never seen before – it was affectionate and warm, but not the way Hannibal looked at him. This wasn’t love or adoration, nor worship, no. It was akin to the way he saw mothers look at their children – a foreign expression he had never had directed towards him. It forced tears to spring up into his eyes. Never had he felt the warmth of a mother’s gaze in his life; it was wonderful. He believed it to feel the way ice must feel on the first day of spring, the beginning of the thaw that led to all things beautiful.

“I believe it would be helpful to work through the difficult connections you have with the idea of family in order to be freed of it, to be able to start your own family.” She smiled softly at him, “I did not mean to offend you, Will. I apologize.”

With frustration, Will wiped the tears from his eyes, grabbed his coat, and stormed out of her office. In the back of his mind, all the memories of the ways he had dreamed of killing his father played on a loop as he white-knuckled the steering wheel.

To be continued…

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

CW/TW: Brief mention of human trafficking during Hannibal's talk with Mischa.

Hannibal entered Mischa's room once more. He has visited her daily for the last month; each day, she warmed up as the world around them grew colder. She spoke more now, often only discussing her daily life in the hospital and how she was getting along with the other girls. Today, however, was different.

"I had a cat. I hope she's okay…"

Hannibal looked up from the pad of paper where he was sketching his darling sister, and tilted his head, humming a quiet response hoping for her to continue.

"Her name was Daina." She lifted her head from her own sketchbook and smiled at Hannibal.

"A beautiful name," he smiled back.

"Thank you," she paused, sneaking a glance at Hannibal's drawing. "Are you drawing me?"

Hannibal let out a soft laugh and nodded. "Yes, Mischa, I've always sketched you. Even during our years apart."

"You've always been better at drawing than me," she sighed, holding her paper up to show him. She was drawing him, and it wasn't a bad drawing, per se… it just wasn't really *good*.

The two smiled, and her light laugh warmed every part of Hannibal. He had missed her laugh and toothy smile; he never thought he would bask in them again. He took a moment to store this memory away in his palace, leaving offerings at Will's statue on the way.

"He found me on my way home from work." She said, abruptly ending the peace in the room. "He- Vladis- he recognized me, I think. From childhood, and I, him."

Hannibal set his drawing tools down, folding his hands in his lap and giving her every ounce of his attention.

"I tried to cross the street to get away from him, but there were men over there too. They took me, and there was no one around to help." Her voice was shaking, but he refused to interrupt. She continued to try and draw as she spoke. "There were so many girls, Hannibal."

Hannibal reached across the table and took her hand in his. She quickly latched onto it and squeezed it with trembling fingers. After a few minutes of silence, Mischa spoke again. “I want to go home, Hannibal.” Her voice was thick with pain and sorrow; it felt like a knife being lodged in his chest.

“And where would ‘home’ be for you now, Mischa?” Desperation seeped into every word. He hoped more than anything that she would want to come with him, far away from the chill of Russia.

Her brows furrowed, eyes growing distant. “I suppose I don’t have my apartment anymore… it has been months.”

Hannibal took a moment to carefully watch her.

“I would like to take you with me to the United States. I have a beautiful home there, and my fiance and I would be delighted to have you. He’s ready to prepare a room for you there, if you’d like.” He spoke softly, scared of overwhelming her.

Her large doe eyes looked up at him, wide and glossy. “I can come home with you?” She questioned, voice shaking somewhat.

Hannibal’s brows furrowed slightly in confusion. “Yes, Mischa, of course. We have been separated for far too long. I would be beside myself to leave you here.”

She stood, long hair falling down over her arms as she came around the table. Mischa wrapped her writhe arms around him and crashed into his warm, solid form, hugging him tightly. She wept openly now, tears wetting his suit as he held her close.

“Please, Hannibal,” she gasped. “I don’t want to be here anymore.”

Hannibal sat at the desk in his hotel room, waiting for Will to answer his video call. They had scheduled the call, and Will was now three minutes late. Just as the call was about to end, and he ready to redial, the call connected and in front of him was a pixelated and crackling video of Will. He was talking, but it was hard for Hannibal to understand anything he was saying. He could, however, see that Will was outside, likely in the depths of their property.

Before the call disconnected, he heard Will yell out, “Ju– Let— All– –Ack!” Hannibal sighed, assuming the translation was, “Just let me call you back.” He waited patiently, and after fifteen minutes, a call came through, which he answered immediately, a smile growing on his face.

Will was still adjusting his laptop to be the proper distance away. He looked to be sitting on the floor of their living room, his back against the seats of the couch. His hair was an unruly mess of curls as always, but he looked pale and exhausted despite the large, crooked smile

plastered on his face. Hannibal noted this, deciding to wait for an interrogation until later. For now, he wanted to simply enjoy seeing his Will.

“Hello, *mano meilė*,” Hannibal said, smiling, leaning fractionally closer to the laptop.

“Hey,” Will smiled back. Hannibal watched as Will looked away and bit at his bottom lip nervously, “Don’t get mad-”

“Will, what did you do?”

“I said don’t get mad! I want you to meet someone,” a massive smile was plastered across his face as he called someone named Winston over. Before anyone could enter the camera frame, Hannibal already knew it was another dog. “Hannibal, meet Winston. Winston, this is Hannibal.”

The dog was larger than most of their other mutts; he was clearly part Shepard, and a strange mix of different breeds, giving him a unique coat. Winston sat next to Will and looked up at him, giving him a wet kiss on the cheek, resulting in a heavenly chuckle escaping Will’s lips.

“I know you said no more dogs, and I’m sorry, but I was driving home, and he was chasing after the car; I couldn’t just leave him there.” Will was still smiling and petting their new dog, making the rest of the pack jealous, slowly appearing around him.

Hannibal sighed but knew there was no convincing Will to surrender the animal. “Very well. Hello, Winston. Will, please, darling, no more dogs; our home is becoming a zoo.”

Will laughed, nodding, “Okay, okay, no more, I promise.”

Smiling and desperately hoping that Will doesn’t break his promise as he had twice already, he asked Will how work was. He watched as Will’s shoulders immediately tensed and saw his eyes look nervously around him.

“It’s been… fine. I don’t think I’ll be eating mushrooms anytime soon.”

Hannibal tilted his head, brows furrowed, silently asking him to explain.

“Some doctor, Stammets, he uh, he was kidnapping diabetic patients, inducing them into comas and using their bodies to build himself a mushroom garden with their bodies. Said he wanted to use mycelium to connect people to one another.”

Hannibal hummed, taking in the information. “The structure of a fungus mirrors that of the human brain. An intricate web of connections.”

“Yeah,” Will nodded. “Got a little too close for comfort,” he let out a humourless laugh. “The new case we’re working on is proving to be a bit difficult for me.”

Hannibal took a moment to take stock of Will’s current appearance. He was somewhat paler than usual and had deep bags under his eyes. There was a heavy, tired appearance to him, and it was hard to tell if his cheeks were somewhat sunken or if his cheekbones were simply casting a shadow.

“Tell me, Will.” He crossed his legs at the knee and leaned back, creating a sense of openness and easily sliding into therapist mode.

“I can hear my father’s voice again, nagging from the shadows.” Will swallowed. “A woman was taking little boys from their families and forming one of her own. Eventually, the kids had to kill their original family to be ‘freed.’” Hannibal watched Will nervously pick at the skin around his nails.

“How are you feeling, Will?”

“Horrible, if I’m being honest.” He laughed dryly. “I can’t sleep, I’ve barely been eating… I talked to Doctor Schwartz; she thinks it’s all stress from being back in the field. She’s probably right.” Will chewed at his bottom lip, pulling Ellie into his lap and petting the small dog.

“How about you make something to eat while we’re on call? Have you eaten anything today?”

Will sighed, moved Ellie off of his lap and stood, taking the laptop with him. With Will in better lighting, he could see just how much of a toll being thrown back into the field has truly had on him. He was paler than he thought, and the bags under his eyes were coloured a deep, bruise-like purple.

Hannibal internally debated whether he should communicate his worries with his partner – he knew Will protected his independence fiercely. Still, he knew Will would insist it was nothing to worry about until the stress nearly killed him. The idea of Will being overworked to death pushed him over the line, “I think you should take a break from work, darling.”

Will had stepped out of frame when he spoke and returned with sandwich materials. He watched as Will walked around the kitchen, gathering everything he needed for his simple meal. Hannibal could see him processing what he had said and weighing it against everything he had said.

Eventually, he nodded. “I think you’re right. I’ll talk to Jack tomorrow.”

Happy with Will’s response, Hannibal busied himself, making breakfast while Will sat down.

“How are things going there? How is Mischa?” He asked between small bites of his sandwich.

“Things are going fine.” He chopped and cooked sausage in a pan, eggs whisked in a bowl. “Mischa has been opening up to me more. She wants to come home with me, to stay with us.”

Will smiled over a bite of food. “That’s wonderful. Guess I’ll start working on her bedroom soon.”

Hannibal hummed in response. “Yes, please do. I will let you know what colour paint she picks the moment I find out.” He paused. “I fear she may be a cat person, Will.” He added in a playful dread-filled tone.

Will groaned. “I don’t know how these guys would do with a cat.” He looked around at what Hannibal assumed was the pack at the edge of the kitchen.

“That’s perfectly fine because we are not getting a cat.” He smiled. “As I said, our home is becoming a zoo – the last thing it needs is another exhibit.”

Will laughed lightly and continued to eat his sandwich in small, well-chewed bites. After stirring the eggs and sausage to completion, Hannibal plates the meal and sits down once more. The two eat their respective meals in a comfortable, relative silence, only interrupted when Will’s phone rings. Groaning and likely assuming it was Jack, he pulled it from his pocket.

“One sec’ Hannibal, it’s Emilie.” Will muted his mic, forcing Hannibal out of their conversation.

Hannibal watched Will the entire time, seeing how his eyes are constantly roaming around the kitchen, occasionally looking behind him. He was accustomed to Will’s nervousness, but he seemed borderline paranoid. Occasionally, he would nod and roll his eyes; eventually, he got up and let the dogs out into the yard. After several minutes, he put his phone down and unmuted his mic.

“Darling, is everything alright?”

Will looked over, exhausted. “Yeah. Yeah, I’m okay, just tired.” He sighed. “I definitely needed to eat, so thank you.” Will rose from the island stool and crumpled up the paper towel he was eating off of. No matter how much Hannibal tried to break the habit, Will refused to ‘waste’ dishes when they were ‘unnecessary.’

Hannibal, of course, did not believe that he was fine. Mentally, he was already pre-writing a strongly worded email for Jack about taking him off the field.

“What did Doctor Schwartz need?” He tilted his head to the side, hands smoothing out invisible wrinkles in his suit.

“She was calling to apologize for our last session and ask if I’m coming back this week.”

Hannibal felt curiosity and anger spark in his chest. “What was she apologizing for?”

“Dug a little too deep with family questions. I ended up storming out.”

Well aware of how sensitive a topic childhood and family are for Will, he is unsurprised to learn of his minor fit. His walls were tall and strong, very difficult to climb. At times, Hannibal wonders if he is ever truly on the inside or simply sitting in a window.

“I see. Hopefully, she does not broach the subject again. I will likely be coming home soon, and, god willing, you will be able to stop seeing her.”

Will sat for a moment, watching the screen with a small smile. “I hope you come home soon. It’s only been a month, and I feel like I’m losing my mind.” He laughed light-heartedly, but Hannibal could sense a hint of truth in the joke.

“I will do my very best to return to your side as soon as possible, darling. There are several things I still have to work out with Mischa. She’s still very sensitive; I do not want to rush her out of care and into a foreign country. That said, I miss you terribly.”

“I miss you, too.”

Hannibal took a moment to simply gaze at Will, watching him gaze back.

“You should get some sleep, love. You look exhausted.”

Will yawned just as he finished the sentence, stretching his arms overhead with a groan. “Yeah, I think you’re right.” He stood, called the dogs in, set their dinner out and took the laptop upstairs. “Will you stay on with me? Just until I fall asleep?”

“Of course, dear.” Hannibal smiled lightly, the anger that once filled his chest blooming into love and adoration for his lover.

He watches as Will goes into their en suite, Winston and Buster following closely behind. The dogs quickly ran out after Will shooed them. To Hannibal’s displeasure, Winston jumped onto their bed, blocking the camera. He doesn’t see Will again until he’s climbing into bed, already stripped to his undershirt and boxers. Internally, he curses the dog for forcing him to miss watching Will undress.

Will settles into the pillows, laying nothing but a sheet over his frame, the comforter completely missing from the bed. Hannibal quickly checks the weather in Virginia. It was nowhere near warm enough to warrant so little covering.

“Aren’t you going to get cold? It’s only 16 degrees, Will.”

He sees Will shake his head ‘no.’ “I’ve been running hot lately. I’ve got the comforter folded at the foot if I get cold, though.”

Hannibal nodded and opened their copy of *Inferno*.

“Read to me?”

He simply smiled and began to read the poem aloud, eyes glancing up every few moments to catch a glimpse of his beloved. A tendril of worry blossomed in his chest as he watched Will drift off into slumber. A million thoughts were racing through his mind as his mouth spilled the memorized words of the epic. As light snores escaped Will’s body, he put the book away and stole several moments to watch him sleep, a deep ache in settling in his stomach when remembering how far he was from Will.

In another tab, he opened his email and started typing out a letter for Jack.

Will needed a break.

To be continued…

Hannibal’s Protein Scramble Recipe:

https://www.tumblr.com/hannibalaesthetic/75940836148/cooking-with-hannibal-protein-scramble

Chapter 16

Hot air huffed against the palm of Will's hand, the steady pounding of his heartbeat and hooves playing in his ears. More than anything, Will wanted to turn around; to see the massive beast guiding him to an unknown destination. He was weary of the creature, not having seen it, but strangely comforted by its presence. All he could make out was its large frame and antlers reaching desperately toward the heavens above.

He doesn't know how long he's been walking; wherever he is, time is irrelevant. The only gauge he has is the growing confidence in forcing himself to turn. It gnawed at him – the need to turn, to see. Just as he is about to turn, he sees movement on the side of the road; a figure. Turning his head to the right, the creature behind him sidestepping to stay out of sight, he sees the body of Garret Jacob Hobbs.

Hobbs stands still, eyes cloudy with death and decay but watching, seeing. He stares into Will, blood pouring freely from his wounds. For a passing moment, Will is jealous of the man for his ability to see so deeply into him, an act that Will has been terrified of doing for the entirety of his life.

Will stands still, staring back, hoping to see whatever Hobbs sees reflected in his eyes. He takes a step towards the man, only to be blinded by red and blue lights. Blinking, Will's entire environment shifts, and his body comes to life; he's outside on a rural backroad and absolutely freezing in nothing more than his boxers and undershirt.

Two men approach Will, lights blaring into his eyes, forcing him to squint as he wraps his arms around his body.

"Are you lost?" One of the officers asks, looking Will up and down.

Confused about what was going on, Will asks, "What?"

The two men look at each other, then back at him.

"What's your name?"

"Will Graham." He rubs his hands over his shoulders, doing what he can to create friction and warm his body.

"You know where you are, Mr. Graham?" The second man asks.

Will looks around. There's a familiarity with the trees around him, but he cannot place his exact location nor how he got there. He shakes his head. "No."

The first officer lowers his flashlight, freeing Will's eyes from the harsh brightness.

"Where do you live?"

“Lovettsville, Virginia.” Dread began to seep into Will’s body; he was lost and alone.

“We’re just outside of Lovettsville, so that’s good. You’re close to home.” He paused, looking behind Will, flashlight pointed on the road. For a moment, Will thought the creature from his dream had been real. “Is that yours?”

Will slowly looked over, nervous but excited to see the beast. Instead, he sees Winston, concerned and staring at Will with a wagging tail.

“Hi, Winston.” The dog trots over and nudges Will with his nose, a light whine escaping his throat. The simple gesture reminds Will’s body that he is alive and awake, pain shooting up from his feet and into his legs.

Wincing, he asks, “Can I sit down? My feet hurt.”

“Why don’t we take you home?”

The officers guide Will to the cruiser and help him get in, wrapping a standard-issue wool blanket around his shoulders. For a moment, he is reminded of his time on the force in New Orleans. It’s the first time he has found himself on the receiving end of this care; he didn’t like it.

He is asked a slue of questions from the open backdoor of the car, all of which he knows are coming and are answered honestly. It’s only when they ask the last question that he hesitates.

“Do you have a history of sleepwalking, Mr. Graham?”

It had taken an embarrassing amount of time for him to process that that was how he ended up where he was, in the middle of nowhere. He doesn’t remember falling asleep and hadn’t fully registered the feeling of waking up. Will took a deep breath and swam through the fog that surrounded his mind so much lately, and shook his head.

“I’m even sure I’m awake now.”

The officers nodded and closed the door. Will sat in the back seat of the cruiser, Winson curled up with his head on Will’s thigh. He pets the dog gently, burying shaking fingers deep into his fur. He sat, contemplating calling Hannibal for several moments while the officers spoke to one another about office politics which he immediately tuned out after providing his address.

Remembering how worried Hannibal was the last time they spoke, he decided against calling. The last thing he wanted to do was pull him away from his sister.

Away from his family.

Will had to discreetly stifle a laugh while looking at the poorly reconstructed Wound Man tableau that this unfortunate nurse has become. He remembered when Hannibal had performed that kill; it was beautiful and precise. This, however, paled in comparison, looking like rushed homework copied off of the smartest kid in class.

The pendulum swings to and fro, and Will struggles to see Abel Gideon's pathetic attempt rather than his murderous lover's beautiful, methodical display.

He goes through the motions of faking unconsciousness, picking the lock on his handcuffs and gouging the nurse's eyes out. Will pulls the IV pole loose, thrusting it into her chest. Picking up various instruments around the room, he stabs the woman, pushing them deeper to elevate her from the floor and put her on display.

A hand touches his shoulder, and the confused, impulsive thrill that fills his body stays stagnant, making his hands shake, and his breath catch. He looks at the nurse, eyes glossing over, thinking that he wishes to complete this composition. It was rushed and incomplete – there were too many empty spaces. He wanted to crucify this woman on tools made for healing.

"Will, are you alright?" A warm, calm voice asks, trying to soothe the adrenaline seeping through his nervous system.

He looks over and sees Emilie, her hand still, lying gently on his shoulder. Taking in a gasping breath, he pulls away, nodding his head. Turning on his heels, he strides toward Jack, aiming to exit the room.

"This isn't the Chesapeake Ripper."

"What makes you so sure, Will?" Jack asked, enthused.

"I see the Ripper, but I don't… *feel* the Ripper. He's an artist. This is plagiarism."

Will felt shaky, body pumped full of endorphins from what felt like a kill he committed. It was invigorating.

"We never made the wound patterns on any of the Ripper victims public." Jack rebutted, switching lanes for some unknown reason.

"He's not the Ripper, Jack." Will shook his head, hands rubbing at his sore, tired eyes, Emilie walking up beside him. "All brutalization was done posthumously, the Ripper, the *real* Ripper, doesn't do that. He likes his victims to suffer, to die slowly, and to his thinking, beautifully. This is– this is not that."

Jack nodded, he and Chilton sharing a sour look.

Will shoved his hands in his pockets. He turned to look at the Nurse one last time, thrill blooming in his veins. "I'm going home."

Will collapsed into bed after a cold shower, hair dripping water onto the pillow shams. It was nearly two in the morning, and he still couldn't sleep. He wasn't sure if it was anxiety, scared of sleepwalking and getting lost or hurt, or if he was genuinely restless. A pounding headache has taken up space behind his eyes, further aggravated by the tightness in his temples from clenching his jaw all day.

Annoyed, he flips over, reaches for his cell phone and yanks it off the charger. Looking around the room, he makes sure the dogs are still asleep and settled. Winston raised his head, tilting it inquisitively while watching Will, only settling back down when realizing he was not leaving the bed. Unlocking the device and blinding himself with the brightness in the process, groaning, he dials Hannibal's number. After two rings, he answered.

"Hello, Will." His deep, warm voice poured out of the speaker and washed over him, immediately loosening tight muscles in his neck.

"Hi, darlin'." He smiled to himself.

"Why aren't you asleep? It's terribly late for you."

"Can't sleep." He sighed, Hannibal, humming a soft sound of understanding on the other line. "I'm not interrupting anything, am I?"

"Dearest, you are never an interruption."

"Yeah, yeah, but am I *interrupting* anything? Are you with Mischa?"

Hannibal sighed, "No, Will, and even if I was, I would still talk to you."

Will shoved his phone between his cheek and shoulder, picking at the skin around his thumbnail. Eager to change the subject, he does just that. "Jack pulled me onto a *Ripper* scene today." He was smiling as he said it, practically seeing an amused quirk in Hannibal's brow.

"Is that so?" There was a glimmer of a smirk in his voice.

"Mhmm," he huffed out a laugh, "seems like Chilton is trying to convince one of his patients that he's the Ripper. His attempt at recreating the Wound Man was good-hearted but laughable at best."

"That sounds like something Frederick would do," he sighed. "He is so desperate for fame that he is willing to destroy this man's mind. Tell me about the scene."

Will nodded along. "Honestly, it was nothing special. He killed a nurse and stuffed her body with anything long and sharp he could find. The only piece of artistry was that he had gouged her eyes out, but even that was lacking. There was no message, no inspiration, no- no beauty – just a recreation based off of a fogged memory losing shape." He paused, smiling. Flirtatiously, he adds, "After all, everything the *real* Ripper does is beautiful."

Hannibal let out a soft chuckle. It was breathy and light and beautiful. “You flatter me, darling. You must be careful, lest my ego grow too large.”

A loud, sudden laugh erupts from Will’s throat. “As if your ego could get any bigger!” Beside him, Winston lifts his head, eyes watching Will carefully. He scratches behind his ears, relaxing the anxious dog. “With your pompous suits and extravagant meals, you flaunt cannibalism, and no one bats an eye –”

Interrupting, he says, “You aren’t funny, Will.”

“– Yes, I am, actually.” Laughing, he adds, “You’re a peacock, Hannibal.”

Accepting defeat, Hannibal lets out a light hmph. “And what of you? Have you spoken with Jack yet?”

Will groans at the sudden, less fun change of subject, the smile on his face dying. “No, I haven’t.”

“Will-”

“I know, I know. I’ll talk to him; I just haven’t had time. I had to substitute for Alana the other day, and my curriculum was changed, so I’ve been editing my syllabus. And with the never-ending stream of crime scenes, I’ve been a bit overwhelmed. It’s been a lot.”

“If you find the time to speak to Jack, you can eliminate, or at least limit, one of those pressures.”

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “I know, I know… but it feels good. Helping people, I mean. It’s also nice to be forced out of the house.”

There was a brief silence held between the two men.

“Take some time to go fishing this weekend, Will. You need to give yourself time to relax and do things you enjoy outside of work.” He paused, hearing Will quietly agree. “Have you been eating? Sleeping?”

Will bit back a sour laugh. “No, not really.” He takes a moment to consider if he should tell Hannibal about how he woke up last, in the middle of the road. Sighing, he decides he shouldn’t hide something like that from Hannibal. “I sleepwalked last night.”

“How-”

“I was woken up by a couple of cops. I ended up in the middle of nowhere on some backroad a twenty-minute drive from home.”

“*Will*-”

Will winces, hearing the concern in his voice. “I know-”

“I’m calling Jack later today.” The tone Hannibal used had a finality to it. There was no arguing with him on the matter, but Will tried anyways.

“I’m going to talk to him, Hannibal.” He groaned, sitting up only to lie back down. “You don’t have to take care of me; I’m a grown man.”

Hannibal must have heard the bitter tone. He quickly moved on, leaving the mention of Jack behind.

“I’m relieved you’re okay, that you didn’t get hurt.”

“Thank you. Me too. Winston actually followed me. He’s been pretty attached to me, keeping me warm while you’re away.” The corners of his lips quirked up, eyes gazing at Winston.

“Then I will have to reward him with a lovely meal once I’m home.”

Will smiled at the mention of Hannibal returning to him, at him calling their house ‘home.’A wash of warmth flowed over him, his body relaxing into the pillows, the comforter pulled up over his shoulders. He turned onto his side, and his breath caught, a lump forming in his throat.

His eyes meet milky white ones. Lying beside him, Garret Jacob Hobbs stares, unmoving, unspeaking. His ears start to ring, his body frozen in fear. Hobbs' jaw moves with a sickening crack, loosening the joints in his skull. Pale, mottled hands lift, reaching towards Will, the stench of death and decay permeating through the room. Just as his hand is about to touch Will, fingers just centimetres from his eyes, Will scrambles backwards, a terrified squeal pulled from his throat as he hits the floor.

Phone forgotten in the sheets, he backs his body against the wall, lifting himself onto shaky knees. Squeezing his eyes shut, he tries to regulate his breathing.

It’s not possible for Garret Jacob Hobbs to be in their bedroom. He’s dead. I shot him ten times. He’s dead. He’s dead. He’s dead. He’s dead. He’s dead. He’s dead.

He’s dead.

Will opens his eyes, and the rotting body that once lay in his bed is gone. His cell phone is bright on the bed, Hannibal’s voice barely reaching his ears. Quickly, he cups the device in his hands and holds it to his ear.

“Will? Please answer me.” He sounded nervous, concern laced in each word.

“Hi. Sorry, I- I must have dozed off and fallen off the bed.” He lied.

“Will, I could hear you hyperventilating. What happened?”

“I- um, I thought I saw something. It’s dark in the bedroom, and it played with my head a little. I’m fine, just overtired. You know how my brain likes to make stuff up.” He tried to let out a lighthearted laugh to ease the tension.

It didn’t work. “Perhaps you should see a physician. It could be something more than stress-”

“I’m sure it’s nothing, Hannibal.” He spits out, harsher than intended. “Sorry, that- that came out sharper than I meant it to. I think I need to sleep.”

There was a long pause, worry evident in every excruciatingly silent second.

“Okay. Sleep well, my love.”

Holding back a sigh of relief, Will crawled back into their bed. “Good night. Love you.”

“I love you, too. I will call you later tonight.”

With that, they ended their call.

Will lay in bed watching the sunrise, slowly waking the sky and pouring into the room, anxiety and fear coursing through his body. He never once turned to face where Hobbs was once lying, terrified of finding his corpse littered with rot.

Morning came, and he, too, rose, setting off for the day, the feeling of eyes on his back never leaving.

To be continued….

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

A glimpse into Emilie's plans...

Emilie starts her day as she always does; a steaming shower, followed by a rinse of ice-cold water, effectively forcing her body and mind into full wakefulness. She sits at her vanity, smoothing a plethora of creams, oils and serums into her skin. Once her extensive skincare routine is complete, she combs back her hair, drying and curling it into neat ringlets that fall over her shoulders. Dressing in a fitted black dress, stockings and sensible heels, she applies her deep red lipstick and makes her way throughout the house.

It was getting cold outside, a chill seeping through the walls. Emilie loved the winter and its fascinating decay; the coolness and ache in her bones reminded her of life more than any sun-filled day could. There was a comfort that came with winter – with snow and ice and the burn on cheeks and thighs when brought out of the cold; the stinging of needles and pins lighting up throughout the body as it becomes reacquainted with warmth. She envied the season and its ability to cloak the earth with a blanket of smooth, soft snow; its mere presence a reminder to nature, to life, to prepare and nurture.

She grabs several throw blankets and places one in each of her children’s rooms, all perfectly suited to the colour scheme of their respective spaces – she would hate for them to get cold at night. It is her sole responsibility to care for them, to protect them from the heavenly embrace of the elements outside.

Kissing the forehead of all four of her darling children and beckoning them to be good, she takes off, coat wrapped snug around her frame as she rushes to the car. The drive to her office is quiet and cold, just as she likes it, sitting in silence the entire way.

After a long, excruciating day of patients whining about petty issues not worthy of a therapist's time, she sat at her desk. She massaged her temples lightly, letting out a breath of frustration. Just as she is closing down the office for the day, a knock sounds at the door. Taking a moment to compose herself, she checks her hair and carefully reapplies her lipstick.

Painting a fake pleasant smile on her face, Emilie opens the door, desperately hoping it isn’t another patient needing an emergency session. Instead, she is met with her darling boy's tall, strong form on the other side. She tilts her head, welcoming him in with furrowed brows.

“Is everything alright, darling?” She follows closely behind, door closed and locked.

Matthew paces back and forth, fingers in his mouth and eyes wide, looking at the floor. Emilie came to him, soft hands resting on his cheeks, holding his face and guiding it to better look at him. He stops, leaning into her touch nervously.

“My sweet boy…” She lifts a hand and tucks a stray strand of hair back. “What is it?”

“I-” He groaned, turning from her grasp and taking a seat in on the chairs. Emilie followed behind, resting on the arm. “I killed one of my patients today. On purpose.” Matthew looked up at her, eyes glossy.

Emilie pet his hair gently, caressing his cheek with a hand, moving it to rest under his chin. The boy was frowning, desperate for a response.

With a soft tut, she pouts. “You have to be careful, Matthew. You put your siblings and I at risk when you act out.” She pauses, hand tightening just so under his chin, preventing him from bowing his head in shame. “No one will question this, right?”

He shakes his head quickly. “No- no, of course not. He was old, and he was gonna die anyways.”

“Good.” She planted a gentle kiss on his forehead, feather light to not leave any lipstick behind. “Now, let’s go home.”

Emilie calls Matthew into the kitchen, gesturing towards the glasses and flatware she had chosen, silently asking him to set the table, which he does without question.

She plates lamb chops, which sit delicately atop fresh greens, grape tomatoes, and radishes. With a clean cloth, she wipes up the edges of each plate, removing fingerprints and stray drops of dressing. Placing each dish onto a large tray, Emilie lifts it and makes her way to the dining room, seeing the smiling faces of all four of her darling children.

A plate is put down in front of each child, always in order from youngest to oldest, ensuring she is the last to receive a serving like any proper mother would, followed by a soft kiss atop their heads. Once she has circled the table, a meal in front of her children, she takes her place at the head of the table. Lifting a glass of wine, she smiles, the four following suit.

“To Abigail. Welcome home, my darling girl.”

“To Abigail,” the three boys cheer in unison.

Abigail dips her head, a blush colouring her cheeks, a smile plastered on. She is seated to the left of Emilie, and holds her hand.

“I am so proud of you.” She smiles, sharp teeth showing. “You fooled them all.”

“Thank you, Mother.”

Glasses come down, everyone taking a sip. And with that, the feast begins.

“Abigail, darling, I have a new task for you.”

The young girl looks up from her plate, glancing around at her brothers, and back at Emilie.

“Yes, of course, Mother.” She smiles at Emilie.

“I want you to get closer to Will Graham. I believe he would make a wonderful addition to the family.”

“Mother, do you think it is wise to have Abigail get close to him so soon?” Tobias asks, utensils set aside.

Emilie’s head turns to him, a stern expression covering her face, just malignant enough to make him falter.

“I apologize. You know what is best, Mother.”

With a gentle nod, she looks at Matthew and Randall, eyebrow raised, waiting patiently for any objections. Randall has kept his head low, fork picking at his food. Matthew, staring daggers into Tobias’, who stares back with a just as pointed gaze.

“Boys,” she chastizes. They look at her, then back to their meals without a word.

Looking back at Abigail, it is clear that she is nervous about this request. She had nearly died because Will took too long to shoot. Emilie knew what she was asking of her, but she was the best chance they had. Deep within Will’s eyes, she could see a broken child born of darkness and all things wicked. Emilie knew that their family was the only way to nurture his true nature, the only way to heal and mend him, setting the feral beast free to roam the world like a true predator among prey.

“I want you to make room for yourself in his life, Abigail. He’s all alone… you know how that feels. Make him feel like he has a family, a sister.” She brushes a lock of hair behind Abigail’s ear before joining hands again, long fingers drawing light circles onto her skin.

Nodding, she pulls her bottom lip in between her teeth, chewing on the delicate flesh.

“Of course, Mother.” She smiled.

“Good.”

A possessive and loving knot swirled in her stomach, wrapped tightly around her womb. For a brief moment, she feels movement; the feeling of a soft kick, just as she had during her and Will's session.

The monstrous form that lay dormant in Will, beating hard against his ribs, begging to be freed from its hollow cage, that was her child. Will was already her son; he just hadn't known it.

She would show him.

She would love him.

To be continued…

Emilie's Recipe

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Will and Abigail talk.

Hollow ribs containing a rabbit heart heaved, her chest pushing against his tight grip around her tiny body. The worn wooden handle of the knife in his hand warmed, steadying his shaking hands.

He held the knife to her throat, begging her to be still, to be quiet, so it would all be over. Her sobs shook through her petite frame, hands clawing at the skin of his forearms.

To the right, he could see the Ravenstag, the creature that had been haunting his dreams, the familiar sound of its heavy breathing reminding him of his journey into the road that night. It stared at him, eyes boring into his skull. With one fogging breath, Will pulled his hand, knife gliding smoothly through sinew and flesh, a fountain of blood blooming and spraying over him.

Smiling, he watched the light fade from Abigail's eyes, gurgling cries pouring from her gaping throat as she choked on the same blood that drained from her dying body.

He blinked, and he was suddenly surrounded in darkness, air struggling to stay in his body as he gasped for it. His hands shot up to his throat, feeling the sensation of wet, hot blood on his skin. Pulling them back, they were dry, not a speck of blood on them.

Will sat up, pulled his shirt from his soaking body, and dragged himself to the washroom, forcing his body to stand the shock of ice-cold water.

Will arrived on time as he always does. His polite, nervous knock on the door echoed and warmed Emilie with sudden joy. A soft thud in her stomach alerted her of his presence.

Excited, she rose from her desk and welcomed him into the office with a soothing smile, gentle hands helping to remove his coat and smooth out wrinkles on the back of his shirt. His anxious frame pulled away after a brief pause; she knew he wanted her love and affection, the warmth that she provided, but she also knew he was afraid of it.

It had been a month since their first meeting, and just as long in his isolation. She could see the pallor of his alabaster skin, the way his cheeks had begun to sink, and his clothes become

baggy as his frame withered away. He had deep bags under his eyes and a fevered, delirious look to him. Perhaps this time away from Hannibal allowed the darker, death-filled and rotted parts of him to flourish. That said, the boy still needed to eat, and she was happy to provide.

Emilie offered him a small snack, a simple charcuterie board set out between the two of them. He was hesitant, hand reaching out as one approached a rabid animal ensnared in a trap. She nodded, gesturing him towards the food, and he readily accepted bits of bread, meat and cheese without a word. After a short while, he swallows, a quiet "thank you" escaping his lips.

"It is my pleasure, Will." She smiles.

Another flutter and thump in her stomach rises, a near-giddy smile painted across crimson lips. Slithering into her seat opposite the boy, she settled in, hands folded neatly across her abdomen, legs crossed.

"Tell me, Will, how are you?"

He settled into the seat, brows furrowed in deep thought.

"Lonely." The word sounded foreign and broken in his mouth, painful for him to admit. It was as if he had to speak the words around broken glass. "*Lost*"

Despite the pain of knowing he was lonely, a thrill of excitement burst within her; he was open and exposed, a pale belly faceup in vulnerability. This was her in, but more information was needed.

"How much longer until your Hannibal is home?" She faked her sincerity while asking. She was sure he saw it, choosing to ignore it in favour of the memory of his beloved.

"Not for at least another month." He swallowed, nervous hands picking at a loose thread on the hem of his shirt. Looking up, he says, "I've never really missed someone before, especially like this. It's strange, loving someone."

Just as quickly as his doe eyes met hers, they ducked away and hid themselves, flickering around the room.

"On the bright side, that means we have another month together. Perhaps you can join my children and me for dinner sometime; we would love to have you."

Confusion paints itself across his features. "I didn't know you had children."

"I suppose it never came up." She smiles, "I have four, now. I've recently taken in Abigail, actually. I'm sure she would like to see you."

"Is that ethical, Doctor? You were there when her parents died."

"Yes," she pauses, pushing a growing rage down. "We both were." Sidestepping his question of ethics, she continues. "She's very bright, Will. She speaks of you often. We have had several conversations about that awful day, and she holds no ire nor ill will against you. On

one occasion, she said she was grateful for what you did; for putting an end to the suffering of all those girls."

He looked pained hearing all of this, as if he had hoped Abigail would want nothing to do with him. Will simply nodded, jaw tight.

"You can come tonight. My boys will be out of the house; it will just be Abigail, you, and myself." She smiles and checks her wristwatch, seeing that they were nearing the second half of their hour.

Nervously, he agrees. "Okay."

She retrieves her notebook, unfolds it over her knee, and starts their session.

Will followed Emilie's car after their session. The sessions with Emilie have proven to be… interesting. She reminds him a lot of Hannibal, with her sharp clothes, perfect composition, and intelligent mind – it was comforting on bad days when he wanted to simply curl up in a ball and never leave, terribly annoying on good days when he remembered he hated psychiatrists.

He was horribly anxious about seeing Abigail again. It would be a lie to say that he had not been interested in reaching out to make sure the girl was okay and adjusting well, but he didn't see how anyone in her position would want anything to do with him.

Driving through the rich neighbourhood in central Washington, he felt uncomfortable. The only times he had been allowed in places like this was for crime scenes or before he and Hannibal moved in together. His clothes were old and worn; he hated buying new and always opted for expensive, long-lasting pieces such as Levi's; this, however, was not the place for workman's boots and jackets with well-worn holes fraying the edges of his sleeves.

He was wearing his father's old hunting jacket, a sturdy piece he stole before moving away, knowing his father would never leave the South again. It was a deep green, and Hannibal always seemed to like it; said it brought out the hidden greens in his eyes. Then again, he didn't know where it came from. It was one of the only things that remained of Beau Graham in Will's life; the only evidence of it belonging to the man previously is the poorly stitched initials "B. G." sewn into the tag. Will always wanted to cut it out but could never bring himself to.

The car rolled to a stop outside an extravagant colonial home, white pillars shooting out of the ground to the roof. An expansive garden ate up most of the front lawn, only cut through with a driveway and walking path. All around him were beautiful but wilting flowers, begonia, hydrangeas, yarrow, and peonies in neat patterns framed the massive house. The coming winter encrusted the petals with a light frost, delaying their rot by mere hours. It would start snowing soon.

He parked his beat-up truck next to Emilie's Roll's Royce, head bowed in the slightest bit of embarrassment. He didn't belong here and desperately wanted to go home. If it weren't for his father instilling the need to put others' desires before his own, for the sake of politeness, of course, he would have instantly climbed back in, driven home, and never called the Doctor again.

Will wanted to see Abigail just as much as he didn't; the two feelings battling at a never-ending conclusion. Emilie, in a way, forced a finality to the war raging in his head.

Waiting at the front door for him, he picked up his step, half-jogging up the steps to keep her from waiting any longer in the cold. The door opened, warmth pouring out and wrapping around his chilled frame.

They stepped in, drying their shoes and toeing them off at the door. Upstairs, he could hear music playing, just muffled enough to be unrecognizable from downstairs. He followed Emilie through the large house, passing vacant rooms and corridors, walls filled with family photos and priceless art. None of her children looked anything like her. Will surmised they must be adopted or took after their father.

Turning, they entered a large sitting room, an entire wall taken up by a terrarium housing the largest snake he had ever seen.

"This," the Doctor gestured to the serpent, "is Jörmungandr."

Will took a moment to gaze at the yellow and black creature that had comfortably wrapped itself into a knot, curled up on the branch that extended across the glass case. There was a monstrous beauty to the snake. She lived comfortably, knowing that no matter how relaxed she became, she was still the most dangerous and fearsome thing in the room. He couldn't help but envy the creature.

Soon, they entered the kitchen. It was large and filled with everything a well-versed chef could need; it reminded him of his and Hannibal's kitchen. Watching Emilie pull several ingredients from the fridge, cupboards, and pantry, he offered his help, which she thankfully and politely declined. Instead, she offered a glass of whiskey, which he accepted gratefully and nursed as slowly as possible, savouring every aspect of its warm profile.

As the smell of the food permeated through the house, Abigail came down, joining Will at the island.

She looked happy and healthy, her skin no longer resembling the dead girls her father killed, her scar on full display, showing the world that she survived. She smiled at him, eyes lit up as she slid into her seat. He couldn't help but smile back.

"Hi, Will," her voice was calm and warm. He had never heard it before besides the gasping, wet breaths she took on the floor of that stole his voice and nearly her life.

For a moment, he thought back to their first meeting, how it ended with the three of them alone in a kitchen, blood pooling at their feet and staining his clothes that have since been burnt to nothing more than ash. Now, they meet again, introducing themselves once more in a

kitchen, without bodies in the corner, without the fuel of human life swimming at their ankles, with this young girl still intact, breathing, speaking and living.

“Hello, Abigail.”

She looked at Emilie, asking what was for dinner, and he couldn’t take his eyes off her. Her dark hair and pointed nose, freckles adorning her cheeks. He didn’t hear much of what was said between Emilie and Abigail, only returning to the waking world when the young girl got out of her seat and called his name, beckoning him to the dining room.

Similarly to Hannibal and his, Emilie’s dining table was long and made of beautiful, dark wood. He was seated across from Abigail, to the left of the head of the table where he assumed Emilie would sit. Soon, the Doctor entered the room, three bowls neatly placed along her arm and hands before she set them down.

Placed in front of him was a beautiful, colourful display.

“Chicken tikka masala,” Emilie provided. “I hope you enjoy it.”

The curry was placed on a bed of basmati rice, which Will scooped up, making sure to get a piece of everything in his mouth, savouring the spice and flavour, soothed by the mild yogurt.

He loved spicy food, and it was a treat to have it. Hannibal dabbled with spice, but was less fond of it. Will never complained, but would buy the spiciest meals he could find near Quantico for lunch to satiate the Southern bone in his body that missed the taste of his youth.

Will struggled to hold in a quiet moan at the first bite, flavours bursting across his palate. Abigail and Emilie both smiled, huffing out a gentle laugh at his response. With rosy cheeks, he apologized, “It’s delicious, thank you.”

“Thank my mother, it was her recipe,” Emilie offered, gently placing her utensils down and reaching for her glass of Chenin Blanc.

Reaching for his own glass, he wafted it under his nose. Hints of apple and mandarin came through, with subtle traces of jasmine and honey. Sipping it, it was a sweet wine, much sweeter than he and Hannibal would typically go for and fairly dry. That said, it paired perfectly with the spice of the dish in front of him.

The three made conversation as their plates slowly cleared of food.

“I hope you know I’m not angry with you, Will,” Abigail said after Emilie cleared the table, the two of them alone.

He took a moment to think of his response.

“What I don’t understand is why. How are you not angry? I- I killed your father, Abigail.” His brows were furrowed, genuine confusion written across his face.

“I know what you did. I also know why you did it… why you had to do it.” She looked down into her glass of water, as if some prophetic vision would come to her. Her hair fell from behind her ear, a curtain of mahogany framing her face. “I just wish I had found the courage to do it sooner.” She whispered the last part, presumably afraid of Emilie hearing her.

He stared intensely into her, but struggled to see the true meaning of her words, all of them hidden beneath a humid fog that clouded his vision. A sting in his gut told him that what she said was partly false, that there was much more to uncover, that she was lying.

Ultimately, he decided to let it go. She was traumatized, going through a massive change and eating with the man who killed her father. No matter what she said, there had to be a part of her that hated him.

“What did it… feel like?” She asked, bright blue eyes meeting his once more.

He swallowed, “it was the ugliest thing in the world.” He felt sick, lying through his teeth about it.

She tilted her head. “Even though he deserved it?” There was no anger in her voice to his confusion.

He nodded, sipping at his water.

“I think he deserved a lot worse.” She chewed at her bottom lip. Subconsciously, he did the same thing.

“I understand why you think that.” He paused, considering his next words. Whispering, hesitantly, he continued, “I think so, too.”

Her hand snaked across the table, landing gently on his. She leaned in, voice matching his tone and volume. He fought the urge to pull away.

“What did it really feel like?”

Something caught in his throat, his heart pounding away in his chest. Tears filled his eyes, desperate to blur his vision.

“It felt good.” He felt stained and shattered, completely filthy with the blood of Hobbs, all of which was revealed in the shake in his voice, vocal cords betraying the truth.

Abigail simply smiled, a single tear leaving her eye, slipping down her cheek.

Before they could continue their conversation, she turned, eyes averting to Emilie as she entered with dessert and coffee. Emilie took her place once more, a wonderful apple cake placed in front of them.

He wiped the tears from his cheek, hand pulled from Abigail’s soft grip. Emilie gave them both a knowing smile, but asked no questions.

To be continued…

Emilie’s Chicken Tikka Masala Recipe

Emilie’s Apple Cake Recipe

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

TW/CW: Mention of human trafficking.

Hannibal held her pale, bony hands in his.

“He will never hurt you again, Mischa. *I promise*.” Tucking a few fallen hairs behind her ear, he continued. “I will find him, and he will be dealt with.”

Immediately, she froze. Her once relaxed state now rigid with fear.

“No, Hannibal. No, no, no.” She stood, shaking her head and pacing the room, socks muffling the sound of her steps on the tiled floors.

He watched, gazing up at her with heartbreak in his eyes.

“He is dangerous.” She stopped, turning to face him directly. “Stay away from him.” As if seeing the defiance in his gaze, he continued. “Please.”

Looking down at his lap, he smoothed out a wrinkle in his slacks and recrossed his legs.

“I can handle myself quite well, Mischa. You do not have to worry, but I need you to tell me where he is.”

He regretted that his attempt at soothing her anxieties seemed to only make them worse. He wished he could take his words back and restart their conversation. She stalked towards him, no longer the small child she once was, but rather tall and thin like a gazelle. Watching her movements, he was shocked to see her land at his feet, hands grasping his.

“Hannibal, *please*. I can’t lose you, not again.” Her voice shook, tears spilling over without much effort.

Tightening his hold on her hands, he drew small circles onto the tops with his thumbs. Leaning forward, he connected their foreheads, eyes finding hers.

“You will never lose me again, Mischa.” He spoke softly, trying to comfort the girl once more.

“Promise me, Hannibal.” Her hands trembled beneath his warm grip.

“I promise, *mylima*.”

Hannibal pulled back, only to pull her into his arms, holding her as close as possible, whispering promises of their safety into her hair as sobs shook through her.

After nearly a half hour, she calmed back down and whispered the intersection closest to where Vladis was. Satisfied, he sat with her for another hour before taking his leave, promising to visit again the following day.

He knew Mischa always saw part of him that no one else but Will saw; she had since childhood. She never cowered from it or encouraged it; simply let it be and grow as it must. Mischa knew what he would do with Vladis; she knew she was sentencing one of the two to their death. All she could hope for was that her brother came out victorious, which Hannibal, determined as ever, would ensure that that be the only possible ending.

Soon, he would kill Vladis. He knew he did not want to display him; no, he would eat him whole, devouring the sins of the wretched man and retaking his family's flesh from his.

After he was nothing more than bones, he would take his darling Mischa and return home to his beloved. At last, peace will be restored, harmony ringing out like a sweet symphony.

The location Mischa had provided was a few kilometres opposite where he had expanded his search radius, which annoyed him to no avail.

It was late when he decided to call it a night and retire to his hotel room.

Snow had begun to fall, floating beautifully in the air before meeting its final resting place on the cold streets of Moscow. It created a light dusting over the city streets before him, once shining with cool dampness, now coated in white. He looked up to the sky, desperate to find the stars. It deeply saddened him that the clouds devoured the vastness above, reminding him that he and Will did not share the same sky.

He thought of Will while walking. The soft memory of his hands wrapped around him on lazy Sunday mornings, the sun pouring into their room and softening his features, making his pale skin glow as if he were the sun himself; it comforted him, pushing the chill and memories of blood-curdling screams away.

Hannibal tried to focus on Will, to imagine him walking beside him, both marching with intent and the same determination to see an end to Vladis. It worked for a while; he could even feel a hint of warmth to his right, where Will always was. Before his thoughts of Will could turn bitter with worry and dread because he knew – he knew something was wrong, he heard hushed tones and a whisper of the name Vladis on the wind.

He stopped in his tracks, pausing outside the dark mouth of an alley where he could hear the voices of three men. They were walking the opposite direction of him, treading deeper into

the dark, cold passage. Once they were a safe distance, he turned, walking into the shadows and following soundlessly, listening to every word.

Three men walked in a line. On the left, a tall, skinny man, far too underdressed for the chill in the air. Next to him was a man just as tall, but far stockier; he was pure muscle. To the right, was a short, stout man; he looked much like his patient, Franlyn, back home.

“Vladis is going to kill you, Andrei. You fucked it up.” The one on the left said, smacking the centre figure over the back of his head.

Andrei, the man in the middle, immediately mimicked the behaviour back.

“Fuck off, Lev.”

“Can both of you shut up and stop acting like children?” The man on the right finally spoke, both Levl and Andrei looking over.

“I told Lev to fuck off, I’m gonna tell you to fuck off too, Ruslan.” Andrei turned to the stout man, Ruslan. “So fuck off.”

Ruslan scoffed, shoving Andrei away and kept walking.

The men walked in silence after that, eventually turning a corner, now on a street still cast in shadow. Hannibal followed quietly, the men ahead of him none the wiser.

Two more turns were made, and the trio entered a building. It looked like a khrushchyovka, likely built under the Soviet Union. At the front of the small complex was two guards, both armed with guns. All around the building were white vans with tinted windows.

Looking up, many of the apartments were lit, but no movement could be seen behind the curtains, most of which were drawn. He crept closer, staying hidden between parked cars and vans; no one would know he was there unless he wanted them to. For now, he was content to remain a shadow and watch from afar.

He doesn’t need to see the man to know he is here. The air is thick with blood, semen and fear; it rolls out of the building in thick waves, washing over him and making his stomach churn. His sister was here, among the innumerable other women currently locked in rooms, all being prepped to be sold to the highest bidder.

It was not often Hannibal was driven by morals or the pain and suffering of others, but in this instance, he would personally see that each of the captives held here would escape.

First, he had to prepare.

To be continued…

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This room was built for sound, to help it bounce softly and land gently, to carry it to every ear housed within. The yellow lights reflected off of the wooden, acoustic ceiling, walls and floor, a spotlight centred on the prized art in the middle of the stage.

Will stepped forward, already walking the steps of the Maestro. His hands find a bow as he circles the corpse. Long, calloused fingers wrap around the cello neck, playing the first few notes on an instrument never before seen, sound vibrating around him in a symphony for one. A chill runs through Will's body, hearing the song play out behind his eyes. Abscently, he knows he is not alone; no, he is performing.

Long, echoed claps sound from Garret Jacob Hobbs' decaying body from the third row. His sightless eyes are trained on Will, tracking every movement. A low, droning thrum plays out, his hands unable to stop from moving to the next movement of this solo concerto.

Slowly, Hobbs comes closer, milky eyes running like egg whites from his skull, dripping out at the tilt of his head. A breath catches in Will's chest when the smell of Hobbs hits him. The illusion immediately drops, and he briskly walks from the body, hand over mouth, desperately trying not to throw up on the scene.

He makes it to the washroom in time, his body shaking as he heaves into the toilet, his entire stomach emptying into the bowl. Vaguely, he recognizes his body shaking and the sweat sticking to his body.

Blinking rapidly, the washroom disappears, and he's home, standing absently in the kitchen, staring at a boiling pot of soup. He doesn't remember leaving the scene, nor talking to Jack or how he got home.

Will looks down at himself; he's dressed in pyjamas, and his hair is wet from a shower. He drops the wooden spoon he held, his breath catching in his chest. Spinning around, Will searches for his phone.

Suddenly, he hears a voice.

"Will? What's wrong with ya, boy?" It's his father.

The sound pulls his gaze, eyes landing on his cell phone on the counter next to an empty Tupperware container. Clicking the home button, the screen lights up. The time reads 7:34 PM. Upon opening the device, he sees several messages from Hannibal providing instructions on how to heat the soup up dance around on the screen. Scrolling through, he sees that the two have had an entire conversation that he has no memory of. Hannibal had sent a few paint swatches that Mischa had chosen, and the two discussed plans for the room.

None of his messages seemed out of character, and Hannibal didn’t seem to notice anything strange.

Nausea rips through him, and he quickly makes a break for the washroom, once more emptying the contents of his stomach. Most of it is bile and acid, the organ depleted. A long drip of drool hangs from his mouth as he dry heaves over the bowl.

A large shadow loomed at the door, its shape familiar and well-known. Looking over, it disappears, only ever standing in the edges of his vision, taunting.

He pulls himself up, washing his face with ice-cold water and swallows two aspirins with a handful of tap water. Will sulks back to the kitchen, moving the soup into a bowl and letting it cool on the counter. His stomach rocked at the idea of eating.

Curling up on the couch, Will drifted off to sleep, surrounded by his pack in various slumber states.

There is a scratching noise coming from behind the wall.

Will wakes, brows furrowed and eyes blurry, struggling to adjust to the pitch-black room. He waits a few moments, unsure of what woke him, when it sounds again.

Just above the fireplace is a skittering; an animal is in the chimney.

He turned a lamp on, rubbing his eyes while he padded over as quietly as possible, not wanting to scare the creature. Will pressed his ear against the wall, listening for the animal's location. The scratching persisted, sounding both above and below his ear. He saunters to the kitchen, retrieving his phone and turning on the flashlight. Kneeling in front of the fireplace, pressing record, he bends his arm up and uses the flashlight to record a short video.

Playing the video back, he doesn’t see anything, nor hear anything. Standing, he opens his voice memo app, and records near the wall where he had placed his ear. He can still hear the scratching and stays silent while he records.

Listening back, he puts the speaker to his ear, volume all the way up. He doesn’t hear anything. Will repeats his several times, each playing nothing more than his slowly increasing breaths. There are several minutes where he simply stands there, confused and afraid, contemplating if he should send the recordings to Hannibal for a second opinion. Ultimately, he decided against it and lowered the damper, closing the chimney from the rest of the house.

He pulled a blanket over his shoulders, Winston following at his heels. The two walked up to the bedroom, and curled up in bed. It didn’t take long for Winston to fall asleep, Will, however, watched the bedroom door, an anxious thrum coursing through his body.

“I’ve finally lost my mind,” he whispered to the dark room.

Nothing answered; the darkness stared back.

Will stepped out of the music shop, the cries of an animal close by distracting him from his interview. Running out into the street, several cars honked at him, further disorienting his confused mind. Looking around, people were watching him, one couple walking a dog; besides that, there was no animal, and no more cries. Resigned and confirming that he is hearing things again, he downs another aspirin and walks back to the store. In the back of his mind, he remembers that he should talk to Hannibal about this.

Once inside, the smell of iron hits him, instantly slowing his steps. His hands moved to the pistol on his hip, freeing it from its holster and warming in his hands. The weight felt comforting as he stepped across creaking wooden floorboards.

Will pushes the sliding door open, finding one of the cops who accompanied him dead on the floor, an endpin lodged in his throat. His eyes reflected lifelessly off of the pool of blood under him.

Quickly, Will pulls his phone from his pocket, dialling the response team number.

“I need ERT at Chordophone Strings downtown Baltimore. Officers down.” He spoke as quietly and calmly as possible, not wanting to alert Tobias of his exact location.

Will continued through the store, opening doors and silently clearing rooms. He soon found a door that led to the basement. Creeping, he made his way down the steps, feet keeping to the sides to minimize creaking. The lights were dim, and chemicals filled the air, assaulting his nostrils.

Stepping forward on the concrete floor, he could hear running water behind a privacy screen. Pulling it aside revealed the second cop, his body bent over, half in a water-filled sink, running over the edge in red rivulets. Will lowered his gun, checking the officer's pulse in a stupidly hopeful way. He was unsurprised when there was no thump under his fingers.

Behind him, the sound of quiet footsteps came. He just barely managed to lift his hands when dark hands wrapped a garrote wire around his throat. The metal ripped into the insides of his fingers, wrist and the delicate skin of his throat, small droplets of blood forming underneath. Will lifted his leg, kicking back at Tobias repeatedly until he made contact, finally hitting one of his knees.

Tobias stumbled back, the wire dropping. Will raised his gun in shaking hands, but his blood made his grip slippery; before he could perfect his aim and fire in a direction that mattered, Tobias rose, pouncing on him from a shadowed corner. Will landed on his back, the wind knocked from his lungs while Budge landed several blows to his cheek, nose and jaw. Will

felt along the floor for his gun, which had been lost during the fall, and failed to find it. Pulling every bit of strength he could, he rolled their bodies and got a few hits in, doing what he could to halt Tobias.

Will could feel blood pouring from his cheek and nose; he could feel the bruises forming and every movement in his body, the way his bones and muscles would move with each hit, sending a jolt up his arm and vibrating through his being. He felt alive watching the mess he made of the man below him.

Lost in the moment, he hadn't seen Tobias pull out a small knife. He only became aware of it as it entered his thigh, pushed in deep and pulled down. His hands came to a stop, rushing to the wound in his leg with a cry; Tobias took advantage of this moment to toss himself on top of him once more, hands wrapped around his throat, pushing, pushing, pushing.

The edges of Will's vision began to darken while his bloody hands clawed at Tobias', failing spectacularly to rip them from his body. Reaching up, he wrapped his own hands around his attacker's throat, thumbs pressed tight against his trachea at the hollow between his collarbones, which only made Tobias push harder and squeeze tighter, using his full body weight to strangle him.

In a last-ditch attempt at saving his life, he reached for the knife embedded in his leg, and tried to pull it loose. Each feeble pull only pushed the darkness consuming his vision closer, pulsing deeper with the same, elevated beat of his heart. He tried to fight back, to kick, punch, scratch and strangle, but nothing worked.

Eventually, the darkness consumed him, and the darkness he became.

Will woke to the sting of a needle.

All around him was blinding light. Immediately, he sat up. Looking around him, eyes struggling to adjust to the bright walls. After a few moments, he recognized the room; he was in the hospital. To his right was a nurse wearing a surprised expression as she stared at him. She quickly turned and left the room without a word.

He looked down at his hands, finding them both bandaged. Upon listing the hospital gown he was now wearing, he found his left thigh similarly bandaged. It didn't take long for the memories to stroll back into his mind, matching pace with Jack's heavy steps as he came in.

Pain pulsed through his leg, forcing him to lay back. Jack came around the bed, eyes locked on Will as he sat and took a deep breath. He looked irritated.

"Will, tell me what happened."

And Will did, down to the last detail. He remembered everything, every breath, every punch and graze of knuckles on bone. His voice was strained and rough, his throat traumatized from his near encounter with death.

“Did we get him? Tobias?” He asked.

Jack looked down at his hands, his head shaking ‘no.’ Will let out an exhausted breath.

“We have some leads, but nothing definitive. We’ve got all the major highways out of state blocked and an APB out. We’re going to catch this bastard.” There was a finality to Jack’s tone that was typically only used when he spoke of the Ripper. Will wondered what had Jack so shaken. “I want you to take a break. Just a week or two. Nurse said you have a fever, and you’re going to be off of your feet for at least a week.”

Will nodded, accepting the much-needed break without argument. He managed a gravelly “thank you” and nothing more.

His mind felt somewhat clearer, and just as Jack was about to leave, he remembered something.

“Jack,” he called out, his voice feeling as if it were coated in broken glass. Jack looked over. “I recognized him. I don’t know where from, but I do.”

Jack nodded as if he already knew this. “He’s a patron of the same symphony you and Hannibal go to; you’ve probably met the man and never knew.” He shrugged, told Will to have a good night, and left.

Abscently, he wondered if Hannibal had anything to do with him getting time off. Then he remembered he needed to call Hannibal. Later, he reasoned.

A few hours later, Will signed himself out and went home to his dogs.

To be continued…

Chapter End Notes

Hello everyone! I hope you're enjoying the fic so far!

I only have one more chapter pre-written (there are many more to be written, do not worry!), which will come next week as usual :)

I'm starting my uni classes again this month, so chapters may be delayed from here on out due to my busy schedule -- just a heads up!

That said, I'm going to do my best to keep things running smoothly.

Thank you for reading! As always, I appreciate your comments and kudos :)

xx <3

End Notes

Hello! This is my first fic, so please be kind! There is lots more to come, I promise!

I'm new to writing, so please be kind!

Comments are appreciated! I wanna know what you're thinking :)

xx

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!